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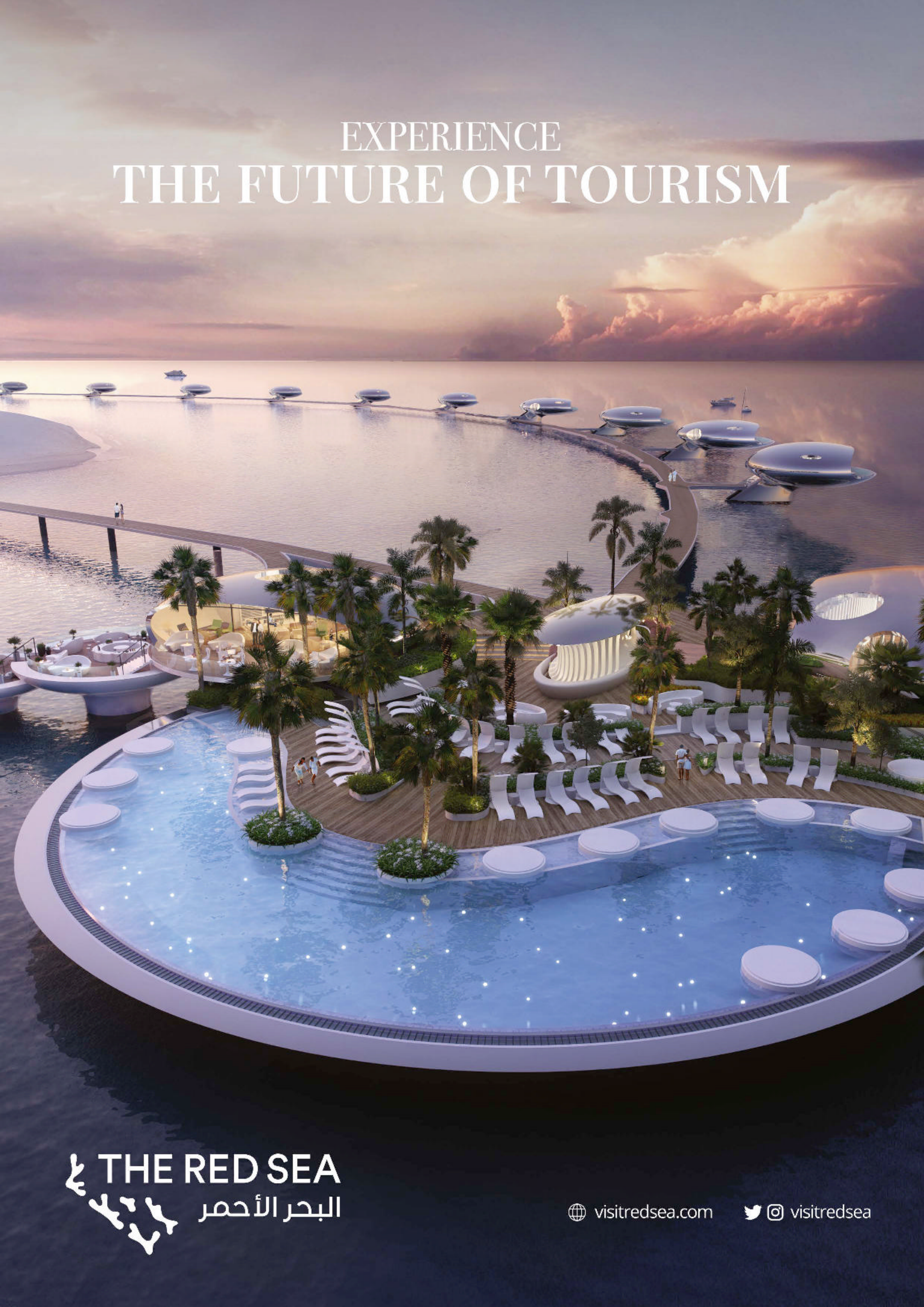
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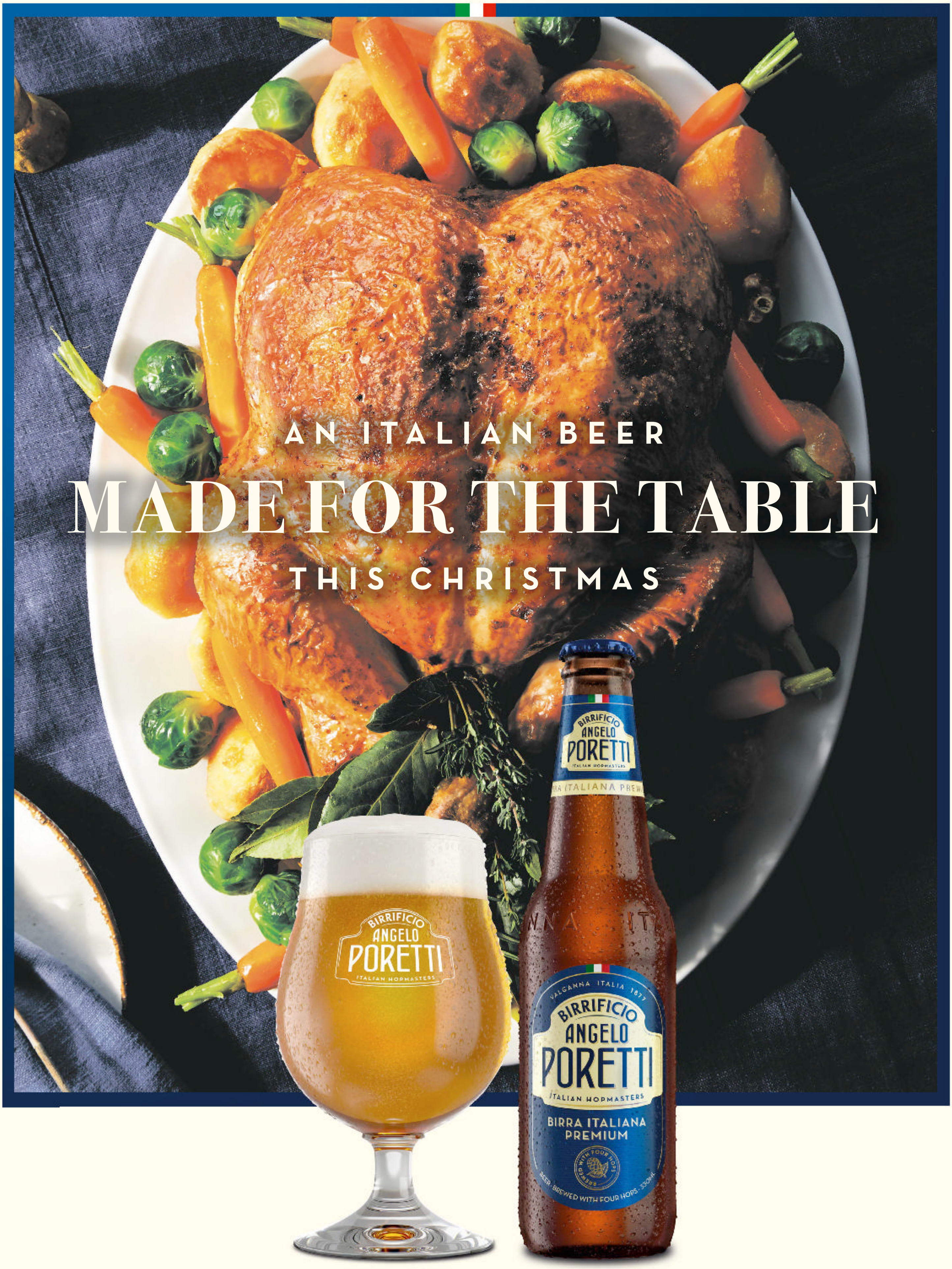

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IMAGE: PETER CASSIDY/RYLAND PETERS & SMALL

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TRAVELLER
FOOD
JUST DESSERTS

White chocolate cheesecake
Image: Stockfood

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I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with, and photographing, the Soh family. They took us to local markets, a hawker centre and showed us how to cook the foods they love. It was a privilege to dive into their world and see the passion they have for their family, for social causes, for food, and how they share that with the world.

BREAKING BREAD, P 96

Aimee Levitt

Chicago is my favourite city, which is convenient since it's also my home. It was a pleasure to think back on some of my most memorable meals here, the ones that inspired me to literally lick the plate. There were many more that I could have included; winter is long here and eating keeps our spirits up.

CHICAGO, P 116

Jennifer Hattam

It's an easy weekend trip to Tbilisi from my home in Istanbul, and I don't know anyone who hasn't come back enamoured with Georgia — and its food. So I jumped at the chance to dig deeper into this rich cuisine and experience how chefs are bringing traditional Georgian dishes up to date while honouring their roots.

TBILISI, P 86

Summer Rylander

I regularly fall down rabbit holes of food history, so I loved revisiting Vienna and taking a deep dive into sachertorte. It's fascinating how, in a city otherwise full of pastries and decadent desserts, a simple chocolate cake has stirred such controversy. What a delicious reminder that sometimes our hastiest decisions lead to our best results.

COVER STORY, P 48

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Editor's letter

ISSUE 18, WINTER 2022

It's the classic dining dilemma — what's the best way to finish off your meal? Cheese board or dessert? A portion of camembert or a piece of cake? A sliver of gorgonzola or a slice of gateau? It's a tough one. Of course, sometimes the correct answer is a bit of both — and so it is with our winter issue, in which we're serving up hearty portions of these two classic comfort foods.

For dessert lovers, we're celebrating the showstopper — those indulgent, often stunning centrepiece puddings that form the high point of any dinner party and are the stars of the festive season. In our cover story, we take a look at how to make them, where they came from and where to find them — everything from comforting trifle and classy Viennese sachertorte to elegant matcha mille crepe cake and the outrageous croquembouche.

Meanwhile, for turophiles, you'll find a generous sprinkling of fromage throughout, whether it's a guide to the best cheese dishes on menus worldwide, recipes for palak paneer, feta-stuffed Syrian pastries and Northern France's own version of Welsh rarebit or a look at the wondrous cheesy bread found in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

For many of us, this winter promises to be more challenging than most. But however the season finds you, I hope you're able to find some culinary comfort.

Glen

Glen Mutel, editor

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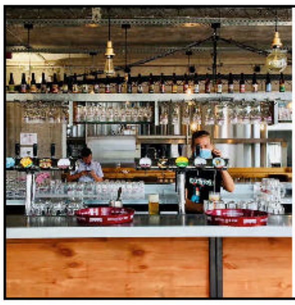

IMAGE: BRASSERIE DE LA SENNE

WHAT'S ONLINE AT NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.CO.UK/FOOD-TRAVEL

Best brews
From Bamberg to Copenhagen, discover seven of Europe's best beer cities, home to brewing traditions and plenty of bars.

Meat-free Zurich
A closer look at the Swiss city reveals a growing veggie and vegan dining scene, with a new crop of restaurants prioritising meat-free meals.

All Ireland
From Michelin-starred magic in Belfast to sumptuous seafood in County Waterford, we pick some of the best menus across Ireland.

TRY IT NOW

Korean corn dogs

THESE DEEP-FRIED SNACKS HAVE LEAPT FROM SOUTH KOREA TO SOCIAL MEDIA TO MENUS AROUND THE UK

While kimchi, bibimbap and gochujang are by now familiar to anyone with a passing interest in Korean cuisine, the latest foodstuff to make the leap from the East Asian nation to the UK is a perhaps more surprising item.

The Korean corn dog (also known as the Korean hot dog) is a riff on the American cornmeal-battered sausage-on-a-stick that's been a staple of food carts and state fairs since the 1920s. The Korean version typically comprises cheese and/or a sausage, skewered and coated in a rice flour-based batter before being deep fried and topped with sugar and your condiments of choice. But variations abound: the batter can sometimes contain small cubes of potato, or the whole thing might be coated in panko breadcrumbs, cornflakes or even noodles.

After the dish took off on social media, Uh K-Dogs N Juicy (uhk-dogsnjuicy.com), in Camden, London, became one of the first to serve Korean corn dogs in the UK when it launched in 2020. It offers various options including a veggie sausage or pickle in the middle, with coatings including Cheetos crisp crumbs. Meanwhile, rival operation Bunsik (bunsik.co.uk) — which opened its third London branch this October — serves variations including potato batter and 'Octo Legs', with sliced sausage sticking out of the bottom like tentacles. And Myungrang Hot Dog (myungranghotdog.co.uk), one of Korea's biggest names in this area, opened in Islington, London, in June, serving all the usual versions, as well as a black squid-ink option.

This trend hasn't only hit the capital, however. Kim's Korean Street Food launched this year in Glasgow's Buchanan Galleries, and offers classic Korean corn dogs among other dishes. Meanwhile, in Didsbury, Manchester, Charlie Mac's Fancy Corndogs has a panko-coated 'Korean Dog' on its menu, containing string cheese and sausage.

IMAGE: ALAMY

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WHAT THEY'RE EATING IN

TORONTO

The Michelin Guide has hit Canada's largest city, so here are the best dishes to try, from the bread course to dessert

'Husband and wife' Sichuan beef at Sunny's Chinese

IMAGE: SUNNY'S CHINESE/GABRIEL LI

ALDER

COCONUT CREAM PIE

Torontonians have long been obsessed with the seasonal Mediterranean dishes served at Alo and Alobar — both recently awarded stars in the city's new Michelin guide. But chef Patrick Kriss's hottest new ticket is Alder, a sleek-but-cosy set up in the Ace Hotel. The thing to order: coconut cream pie. A decadent macaroon crust is topped with a silky wedge of coconut pastry cream, toasted coconut chunks and caramelised white chocolate shavings. acehotel.com/toronto

SUNNY'S CHINESE

HUSBAND AND WIFE BEEF

Toronto isn't short of great regional Chinese food, and new Kensington Market spot Sunny's is putting its own spin on it. A brick-and-mortar outpost of a popular pop-up, Sunny's serves dishes such as Guangdong-inspired soft tofu with spring onion and ginger oil, and Hong Kong-style French toast with black sesame jam. But the must-try is 'husband and wife' Sichuan beef: tripe and shank with chilli oil and peanuts. Even non-offal-lovers rave about it. sunnyschinese.com

CAROUSEL BAKERY

PEAMEAL BACON SANDWICH

A sandwich stuffed with Canadian peameal bacon — wet-cured, unsmoked and rolled in cornmeal — has been served from a stall in Toronto's food emporium St Lawrence Market for decades, and yet its popularity never wanes. Be prepared to queue, and eat it au naturel, with just the meaty juices or slather on a lick of mustard. Or go really wild with the breakfast version: furnished with a fried egg and cheese. Once you've fuelled up, other vendors hawking sticky maple treats and baked goods await. St Lawrence Market, Upper Level 42

HENRY'S

SHRIMP TOAST

The hip young things that flock to Henry's know it's not your average wine bar and bottle shop. For starters, this new opening on Queen Street West has a list of fine or quirky tipples that can be hard to come by locally. But it's the boundary-pushing food, combining Asian and European flavours with Canadian produce, that really excites. The eclectic style is best summed up by the moreish shrimp toast, garnished with lemongrass aioli and mustard. Wash it down with an elegant Meursault Premier Cru. henrystoronto.ca

OSTERIA GIULIA

FOCACCIA DI RECCO

Of the many Italian restaurants in Toronto, it was the latest venture from *Top Chef Canada* runner-up Rob Rossi that caught the attention of the Michelin Guide, which awarded it a star. The Liguria region is the inspiration, and so plentiful seafood — Nova Scotia lobster, grilled sea bass — are highlights, as are the ribbony pastas. The tone is set by the focaccia di recco, which is stuffed with mild stracchino cheese, baked and served with extra virgin olive oil and sea salt. osteriagiulia.ca

Alicia Miller

NUMBER CRUNCHING

Chocolate

FROM THE BELOVED HOT DRINK OF AN AZTEC EMPEROR TO JOSEPH FRY'S FIRST BAR IN 1847, CHOCOLATE HAS DAZZLED THE WORLD'S TASTE BUDS FOR CENTURIES

6.3 tons

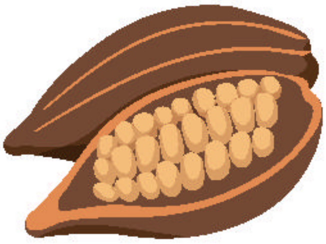
The weight of the largest chocolate bar ever made. It was created by Thorntons to mark the company's 100th birthday in 2011. The bar covered an area of 16sq metres

£470

THE MOST EXPENSIVE CHOCOLATE BAR EVER SOLD. IT ACCOMPANIED CAPTAIN SCOTT ON HIS 1901 EXPEDITION TO ANTARCTICA, AND WAS AUCTIONED 100 YEARS LATER AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON

156

The age, in years, of the oldest chocolate bar still in production, Fry's Chocolate Cream, which was first produced in 1866



500

The number of cacao beans it takes to make 1lb of chocolate. One cacao tree produces 20 to 30 pods a year, each containing 30 to 40 beans

38%

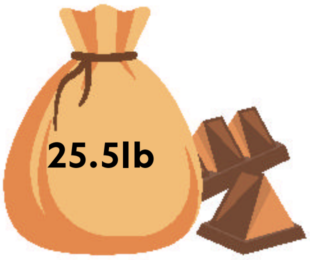
The proportion of the global output of cocoa that the world's biggest producer, Ivory Coast, is responsible for (2.2m tons). Second on the list is neighbouring Ghana, with 800,000 tons

1657

The year the first chocolate house opened in the UK, although it focused on drinking chocolate. It wasn't until 1847 that the chocolate bar was invented by Joseph Fry in Bristol

50

THE NUMBER OF CUPS OF CHOCOLATE THAT AZTEC EMPEROR MONTEZUMA II DRANK EVERY DAY – AT A TIME WHEN CACAO BEANS WERE CONSIDERED SACRED AND USED AS CURRENCY



THE AVERAGE AMOUNT OF CHOCOLATE THAT EACH SWISS PERSON CONSUMED IN 2021, MAKING THEM THE WORLD'S BIGGEST CHOCOLATE EATERS

SOURCES: HISTORYCOLLECTION.COM; RAINFOREST-ALLIANCE.ORG; WORLDATLAS.COM; GUINNESSWORLDRECORDS.COM; MUSEUMOFHOTCHOCOLATE.CO.UK; CADBURY.CO.UK; OLDEST.ORG; STATISTA.COM

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MAKE PERFECT

AREPAS

These cornmeal cakes, which are a staple in Colombia and Venezuela, are extremely versatile. Words: Ruth Christianson-Monroy

BACKGROUND
Arepas are served with most meals in Colombia and are popular in Venezuela, too. The classic Colombian kind are made with milled corn, while arepas de choclo, named after the Quechua word for maize, are thinner, sweeter and often mixed with whey cheese.

DOUGH
These days, arepas are usually made with pre-cooked corn flour, rather than the traditional dried, raw corn kernels. Add 900ml water, 15g sunflower oil and salt to 500g flour, mixing well by hand until there are no lumps. Leave to rest for 10 minutes to absorb the water.

SHAPING
Lightly oil your palms and weigh out 150-200g of dough for each arepa. Next, roll each piece of dough into a ball between your palms using light pressure. Gently pat the dough balls flat with your hands until you have a disc about 1.5-2cm thick.

GRIDDLING
The healthiest way to cook arepas is by griddling. On a medium heat, lightly oil a hotplate or pan. Cook the arepas for a few minutes on each side, gently turning them over when they start to puff up with air. They should be toasted and golden on each side.

FRYING
Frying is a popular way to make arepas de huevo (with egg). Form the dough as normal and then lightly deep-fry for 2-3 minutes. Cool the arepa and carefully slice it open, before cracking an egg inside and sealing the hole with more dough. Re-fry for 3-4 minutes.

FLAVOURS
In Colombia, arepas are often served with butter or cheese, while in Venezuela they tend to be filled with meat. However, they're versatile. Cut your cooked arepas half open and fill with things like grated cheese, pulled meats, plantains, beans and salsa — practically anything goes.

Ruth Christianson-Monroy is founder of London-based modern Colombian cuisine company Maize Blaze. maizeblaze.com

IMAGE: GETTY

SPOTLIGHT

Traditional sweet shops

WITH THEIR ANTIQUE SCALES AND SHELVES LINED WITH COLOURFUL JARS, OLD-FASHIONED SWEET SHOPS CAN STILL BE FOUND ACROSS THE UK. HERE ARE FIVE OF THE BEST

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Price £1.40 ¼ lb
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LEMON BON BONS
RASPBERRY BON BONS

1 Gordon & Durward, Crieff

This Perthshire institution has been catering to sweet-toothed locals since 1925. Step inside and you'll discover shelves stacked with classic confectionery — including crumbly Edinburgh rock, fluffy Scottish macaroons and sugar mice — plus glass display cases full of animal-shaped novelty chocolates. Peer through the window at the back of the shop to watch the staff making sweets by hand. scottishsweets.co.uk

2 Mr Humbug, Greenwich

David Fireman's parents run a traditional sweet shop in Norfolk. In 2004, he decided to bring this family expertise to London, specifically Greenwich Market, where Mr Humbug's pink-and-white striped facade certainly stands out. Visitors can stock up on butterscotch, gobstoppers, toffees and more — all weighed out in quarter pounds, just like in the old days. mrhumbug.com

3 Mrs Beightons Sweet Shop, Haworth

At this cheery, family-run store on Haworth's Main Street, you can take your pick from more than 500 varieties — including boiled sweets, caramels and gummies. Besides British childhood classics, there are US favourites such as Pop Tarts, Reese's Pieces and Warheads on offer, too. mrsbeightons.co.uk

4 Hardys Original Sweet Shop, Cambridge

This confectioner has several shops across the UK, including in Cambridge, where it's popular with students, locals and tourists alike. Take your time browsing the shelves crammed with colourful sweets, from traditional treats such as mints and aniseed balls to modern-day delights like Skittles and M&Ms. There are even Chocolate Frogs and Jelly Slugs for fans of the Harry Potter franchise. hardyssweets.co.uk

5 The Oldest Sweet Shop in the World, Pateley Bridge

While technically not the world's oldest — that title belongs to Ichimonjiya Wasuke in Japan — this North Yorkshire stalwart is certainly England's. First opened in 1827, it's a real blast from the past, right down to the antique measuring scales and old-fashioned cash register. Its sweets are similarly old school — try the pontefract cakes: black, coin-shaped liquorice sweets named after the Yorkshire town that was once a centre for liquorice growing. oldestsweetshop.co.uk

From top: Chocolates on display at Gordon & Durward; Mrs Beightons Sweet Shop; jars of bonbons at the Oldest Sweet Shop in the World (it's in fact the oldest in England rather than the world)

WORDS: DELLE CHAN. IMAGES: GORDON AND DURWARD; MRS BEIGHTONS SWEET SHOP; ALAMY

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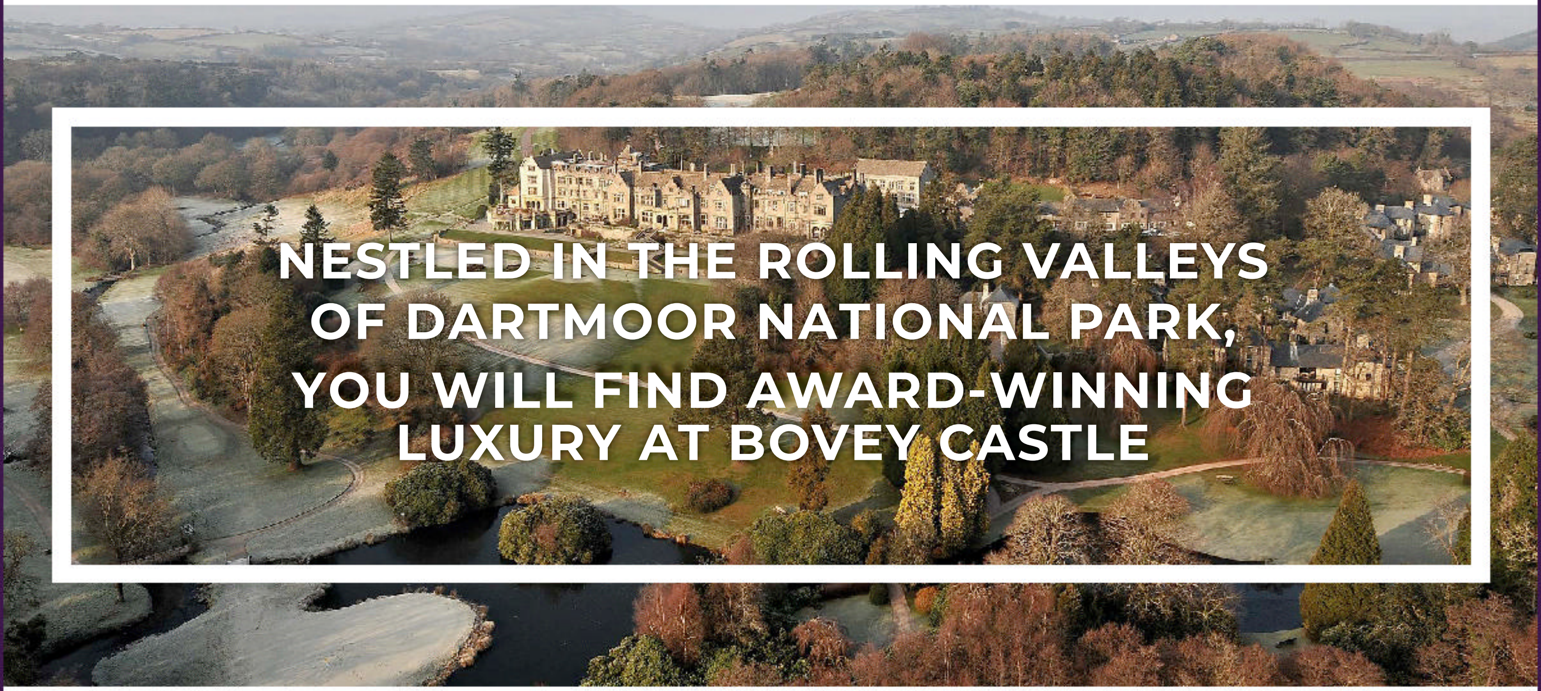

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MEET THE MAKER

GO WITH THE GRAIN

Having taken her family's Tuscan rice farm organic, Ariane Lotti is committing to even more sustainable production techniques

"When you think about Tuscany, you don't necessarily think about rice production," says Ariane Lotti as she drives around the rice paddies on her family farm. It's September, a couple of weeks before harvest time, and the rice has grown tall and golden over the summer.

Tenuta San Carlo is organic, so Ariane worries about worms and insects attacking the rice. Still, there are enough natural predators in the water: frogs, crayfish, snakes, lizards and birds. Down towards the beach, wild boar and deer roam free in the protected pine forests. The coastal region of Maremma hasn't always been this lovely, though. Until the malaria-filled marshes were drained in the 1930s, agriculture was virtually nonexistent in the lowlands. Ariane's great-grandfather, Achille, brought his young family here from Northern Italy in 1936; 30 years later, his son Ennio took a gamble and tried growing rice on the family plot. It worked, and soon others followed suit; there are now half a dozen rice producers in the area.

When Ariane and her sister Samantha took over the 1,200-acre farm in 2003, they realised their options were either to sell it or for one of them to move here and manage it properly. "We were born and raised in New York City, but we came here a lot as children, and we're very connected to the land," says Ariane. Having given up her job in Washington, DC as a lobbyist for sustainable and organic farmers, she began transitioning the farm to certified organic rice production, relying on crop rotation, mechanical weeding and cover crops.

"My neighbours told me it would never work, but now some of them are going organic, too," Ariane says. She's also testing out regenerative methods, which involve going almost two years without disturbing the soil and are, Ariane says, "absolutely the future of agricultural production".

The rice is gathered with a specialist combine harvester in late September, a time of optimum humidity. The kernels are dried on site before being processed at a stone mill in Northern Italy, which removes the tough bran. The farm currently grows carnaroli and ribe varieties. The former is perfect for risotto, with a large kernel and a starchy centre. Ribe, meanwhile, is more versatile — "a mid-length grain that's as good for rice salads as it is for desserts", according to Ariane.

She's assisted by around half a dozen staff, some of whom live on the farm with partners and children, so while the operation has changed since those first grains were planted six decades ago, family is still at its heart. *Tenuta San Carlo rice can be bought in shops across Italy or at the farm, which also offers accommodation.* tenutasancarlo.com *Phoebe Hunt*

HOW TO USE IT

Wild asparagus and herb risotto

Nettles, bitter greens and wild asparagus grow along the sandy marshes throughout Maremma. They work perfectly in a creamy risotto of carnaroli rice enriched with parmesan and plenty of butter.

Budino di riso

A traditional Tuscan rice pudding with a little lemon zest, encased in thin shortcrust pastry, this dessert originated in Siena and is now found in bakeries across the region.

Supplì Maremmani

Risotto leftovers are used to make supplì, Rome's equivalent of Sicilian arancini. Ariane adapts the classic recipe with a filling of pecorino or buffalo milk cheese from nearby cheesemaker La Maremmana.

IMAGES: LUCREZIA FICETTI

THE DRINK

The dark side

STOUTS AND PORTERS MAKE PERFECT WINTER PINTS. BUT HOW DO THEY DIFFER? WORDS: THE THINKING DRINKERS

So, what are we drinking?
Porter, which was created in Britain in the early 18th century and quickly became the world's first truly global beer style. It was likely the brainchild of London's brown beer brewers, who were feeling the heat from out-of-town pale ale producers. Hoppier and brewed with high roasted malt, it was crucially the first type of beer to be aged at the brewery rather than in pub cellars. This meant it could be kept for longer in enormous, 108-gallon casks called 'butts' and, thanks to technical advancements such as the invention of thermometers and saccharometers, it could be produced throughout the year.

Why is it called porter?
As London's blue-collar beer, it was incredibly popular among the city's porters, who shifted stuff on and off the ships on the banks of the Thames and moved goods around the streets. After a gruelling day, they slaked their thirst down the pub with a pint of porter accompanied by a few oysters.

What's the story with stout then?
'Stout porters' emerged in the late 18th century — a stronger porter, brewed with extra brown malt. The term 'stout' initially referred to a bolder version of any beer style and it wasn't until the mid-19th century that stout became a distinct style of its own. The most popular style, synonymous with Guinness, is Irish dry stout, with other styles including oatmeal stout, the stronger Imperial Stout (first brewed for Peter the Great of Russia) and the rarely spotted milk stout. These days, in terms of ingredients, brewing methods, strength, taste and appearance, modern stouts and porters are pretty much indistinguishable.

Guinness once claimed stout is 'good for you'. Is it?
No. Alcohol seldom is. And it certainly wasn't healthy for the eight people who drowned in the London Beer Flood of 1814, when butts containing 3,500 barrels-worth of porter exploded on Tottenham Court Road.

THREE TO TRY

Kernel Export Stout 1890
An inky, oily, toasty drop smudged with smoke and chocolate mousse on the mid-palate. thekernelbrewery.com

Harvey's Brewery Porter
An example of a Victorian porter produced in one of Britain's most historic breweries. harveys.org.uk

Harviestoun Ola Dubh
This smoky classic is made by aging Harviestoun's Old Engine Oil in barrels formerly occupied by whisky. harviestoun.com

NORTH BAR
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WHERE TO DRINK IT

North Bar, Leeds
Considered by many the UK's first craft beer venue, North Bar hasn't lost its mojo. You'll find superb stouts and porters in its fridges and cellar. northbrewing.com

The Cow Saloon Bar & Dining Rooms, London
Explore the classic culinary kinship between oysters and stout at this trendy Notting Hill local. thecowlondon.com

The Porterhouse, Dublin
Not content with more craic than a builder's bum, this Irish elbow-bending institution boasts its own range of top-class porters and stouts. porterhousebrewco.ie

IMAGES: ALEX MILLHOUSE SMITH; STOCKFOOD

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FIVE WAYS WITH

Walnuts

A FESTIVE FAVOURITE, THIS ANCIENT NUT IS A KEY INGREDIENT IN SEVERAL MEDITERRANEAN CUISINES. WORDS: MIRKO TERZO

Walnuts have a rich culinary history — in fact, they're the world's oldest tree food, with archaeological evidence of their consumption by humans dating back as far as 7000 BC. They were first cultivated in the Middle East 4,000 years ago, and today they're grown and eaten all around the world.

They're one of my favourite ingredients to cook with. Not only do they have health benefits — being rich in Omega-3, for one — they're also quite versatile and work in a surprising array of dishes. I find they're best when roasted, as this brings out both their pleasing aroma and crunchy texture while also taking their flavour to the next level.

I particularly like to use them in desserts as they're mild, fruity and earthy and complement other ingredients well. For example, at Hovarda, we use them as a crunchy topping for our lokma — a type of Turkish doughnut — which we serve with honey syrup and ice cream.

Mirko Terzo is head chef at Hovarda. hovarda.london

1 Muhammara

A spicy dip made with walnuts, red peppers, pomegranate molasses and breadcrumbs. It's common in southeastern Turkey, where many dishes are similar to those in neighbouring Syria and Lebanon.

2 Walnut sucuk

Named after the spicy Turkish sausage, on account of its shape, this dessert sees walnuts strung together and dipped into a warm paste of sugar, starch, flour and molasses. They're then hung until dry.

3 Dukkah

Combine chopped, roasted walnuts, coriander seeds, cumin seeds, black peppercorns and sesame seeds in a jar and shake wildly. Mix with olive oil to make a dip or sprinkle it over roasted vegetables or hummus.

4 Preserved Walnuts

Also known as glyko karydaki, preserved walnuts are one of the most popular traditional Greek 'spoon sweets'. They're made with unripe green walnuts in spring or early summer.

5 Baklava

While baklava is often made with pistachio, an alternative version of this traditional dessert sees layers of golden-brown filo pastry filled with crushed walnuts and garnished with honey syrup.

IMAGE: GETTY

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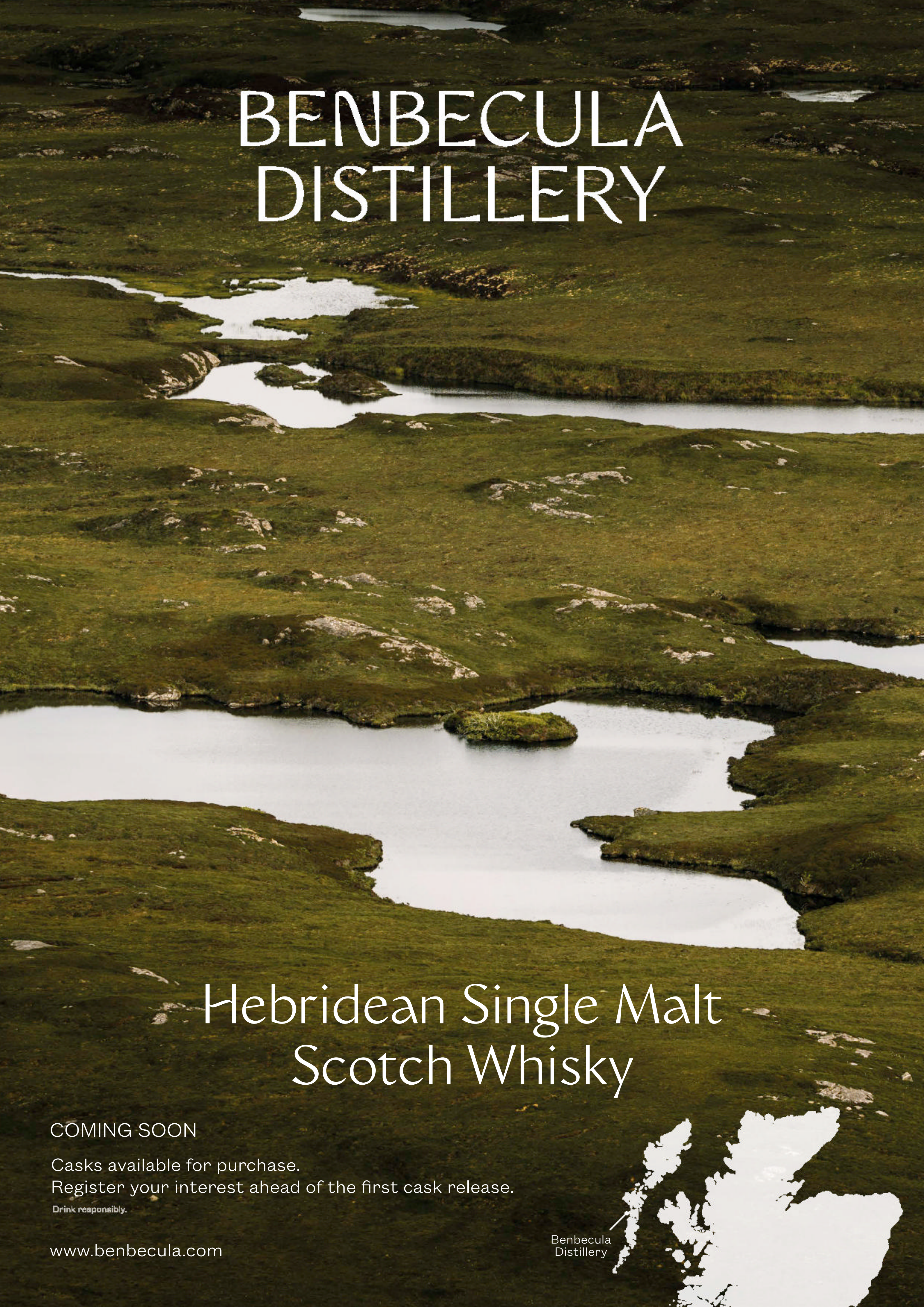
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WINES

BUBBLING UP

Whether sweet or dry, a single vintage or a blend, champagne remains the perfect option for festive celebrations. Words: Fiona Beckett

Nothing marks a special occasion like a bottle of champagne. That's been the case for as long as most of us can remember and, despite other options moving in and out of fashion, it still is.

The champagne houses have been extremely clever about protecting their patch. No other wine-producing region is allowed to use the C word. What's more, other producers can't even use the term méthode champenois, even if they follow the same production method, which involves months of ageing and a secondary fermentation in the bottle.

All champagne is produced within an area of vineyards no bigger than 84,000 acres, yet there are different styles. Vintage champagnes — those made from a single, particularly good harvest — are aged for longer and are generally weighty wines that you need to service with food. However, most champagnes are actually non-vintage, meaning they're a blend of different vintages. These can vary, depending on the style of the house — Taittinger, for example, is relatively light, while Bollinger is considerably richer.

Most of the big brands source their grapes from all over the Champagne region, which stretches from Reims in the north down to Troyes in the south. But there's been increased interest over the past few years in so-called growers' champagnes — made by producers using their own grapes, something that allows for more individuality of style.

Most champagnes are a blend of three grape varieties, namely chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. However, some are based solely on either light or dark-skinned grapes (known as blanc de blancs and blanc de noirs, respectively). And when it comes to rosé champagne, a small proportion of still red wine is added for colour and additional fruitiness.

The other big trend in recent years has been to reduce the dosage, which is the sweetened wine that's added to the bottle before it's corked. For most brands today, the dosage is lower than it once was, partly due to the fact that grapes have got riper as a result of global warming, and partly because of sweet champagne falling out of favour. Of course, with some champagnes — those referred to as extra brut or ultra brut — there's very little dosage, and in brut nature none at all. What you opt for naturally depends on how sweet a tooth you have.

The other big decision is how much to pay and that depends partly what you want it for. There are perfectly decent champagnes available for around £14-15 (Aldi's Veuve Monsigny and Lidl's Comte de Senneval, for instance), which would be ideal for a party. But for something more important, like a romantic dinner or a special gastronomic meal, you might want to choose one of my picks below.

FIVE TO TRY

Champagne Gremillet Selection Brut
A great value, classic non-vintage champagne from a family-owned producer blending rich toastiness with a citrussy freshness. Would be great with fish and chips, parmesan biscuits or anything deep-fried or crispy. £29.99. virginwines.co.uk

CHAMPAGNE
PAUL GOERG

Paul Goerg Premier Cru a Vertus Blanc de Blancs
This rich, creamy champagne comes from premier cru vineyards in one of the best chardonnay terroirs of the region. It would be perfect alongside simply grilled fish, scallops or a fish pie. £35.99. laithwaites.co.uk

ANDRÉ CLOUET

Andre Clouet Chalky
A leaner, more linear style of blanc de blancs with a purity underlined by the striking white bottle. The low dosage makes it a great match for raw and lightly cooked shellfish such as white crab meat or langoustines. Try it with smoked salmon, too. £42. tanners-wines.co.uk

Rosé
CHAMPAGNE
GONET-MÉDEVILLE

Gonet-Médeville Rosé Extra Brut 1er Cru
A growers' champagne with pretty, red berry fruit that exhibits all the charm of rosé. Drink it as an aperitif or with sashimi, but it would be also delicious with prawns or a goat's cheese salad. £43.95. leaandsandeman.co.uk

CHAMPAGNE
BERRY BROS & RUDD
2013

Berry Bros & Rudd Champagne by Mailly 2013 Grand Cru, Brut
Champagne in a magnum is ideal for a special occasion. This rich, toasty cuvée under Berry Bros & Rudd's own label is great value for a vintage that's almost 10 years old and would go well with roast turkey. £82 for a magnum. bbr.com

IMAGES: PEACH DESIGN; KRYSTI AN KRZEWINSKI; VIRGIN WINES; LEA & SANDEMAN CO. LTD; LAITHWAITES

CULINARY ADVENTURES

in the heart of the Arctic

Situated in the Arctic Wilderness Lodge, the Maku Restaurant offers premium culinary experiences using locally sourced ingredients while overlooking the famous salmon fishing river, the Alta River.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

OUR PANEL ANSWERS YOUR CULINARY QUESTIONS, FROM THE BEST VEGAN MEAL KITS TO HOW TO MAKE UKRAINIAN DUMPLINGS

THE EXPERTS

Alice and Lucy Johnson
Founders of Vegan Sisters

Adrienne Cooper
Founder of Fun Foodie NYC

Joelle Thomson
New Zealand-based wine writer

Olia Hercules
Author, *Mamushka: Recipes from Ukraine & Beyond*

Which vegan meal kits would you recommend?
Alice and Lucy Johnson: For breakfasts that deliver olfactory delights, Dishoom's Bombay-style meal kits (from £18 for two, dishoom.com) hit the spot. The Vegan Sausage Roll Naan Kit features sausages created by renowned chef Neil Rankin, tomato chilli jam, cream 'cheese', coriander and spices for a steamy pot of comforting chai. The kit with a bloody mary is perfect for an extra kick.

Pasta-lovers should order from Pastan (pastan.co.uk). Mix and match from the selection of vegan pasta, gnocchi and scintillating sauces (pasta and gnocchi from £4, sauces from £6) or opt for complete dishes (from £13 for two). Our favourite is the barbecue jackfruit.

Grubby is more budget-friendly (from £8.88 for two, grubby.co.uk), with over 150 recipes, as well as a selection of family boxes. The kits champion British produce while showcasing multicultural recipes, from Sicilian tagliatelle to Thai curry. Plus, Grubby offsets its food waste, uses 100% recyclable/compostable packaging and delivers by bike wherever possible.

What are the best alternative food tours in NYC?
Adrienne Cooper: While the selection can be overwhelming, the good news is that whatever your niche, this city has got a nibble for it.

Gregory Marro of Greg Walks NYC (gregwalksnyc.com) offers a variety of unique options, including his two-hour Greenwich Village LGBTQ+ History and Food Tour (£70 per person). His tours are outstanding — whether he's breaking out into song, telling you an old family tale or sharing a Sicilian panini with you.

When people refer to New York as a melting pot, they're talking about Queens. As one of the most ethnically diverse metro areas in the world, the food is beyond compare. And there's no one better to take you through it all than Joe DiStefano (joedistefano.nyc/tours). He's got a few tours, but to get the best bang for your buck, go for the World's Fare Eating Along the 7 tour (£200 per person for a 4.5-hour tour). You'll feast on snacks and dishes from China to Latin America, Nepal and beyond — think Ecuadorian roast pig, peking duck sandwiches and a selection of Filipino desserts.

For the last one, you'll need a boat — the Staten Island Ferry, to be exact. Join Meredith Toback, native Staten Islander and owner of Cititrek Tours (cititrek.com/staten-island), as you sample goods from Albania, Sri Lanka and Mexico (£133 for two people for a two-hour tour). Plus, the view of the Statue of Liberty is great with a full belly.

IMAGES: JOSH CAMPBELL; GETTY; KRIS KIRKHAM

I'm going to Marlborough in New Zealand — where can I stay that's close to a winery?

Joelle Thomson: Marlborough, on the northeastern tip of South Island, is the country's biggest wine region, and with that comes a vast number of accommodation options offering great views of lush vineyards and rolling mountains.

The French Barn at Dog Point Vineyard (dogpoint.co.nz) is a spacious, self-contained, two-bedroom villa situated on the top of a hill in the Omaka Valley. Rooms here are large, light and luxurious, and there's a great outdoor living area, too. This is one of the region's most important wineries, specialising in complex sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and pinot noir. It was founded by two key influences in Marlborough's formation as a wine region: viticulturist Ivan Sutherland and winemaker James Healy. To make the most of your stay, book a personalised tour and wine-tasting session ahead of time.

Vintners Retreat (vintnersretreat.co.nz) is a group of 12 boutique, self-contained villas with heated pools and tennis courts. While it's not a winery itself, it's located very near a great selection of them, including Allan Scott, Cloudy Bay, Whitehaven and Wither Hills, among others.

Lastly, there's The Marlborough (themarlborough.co.nz), a beautifully refurbished building that dates from 1901, set on 16 acres of manicured gardens. The lodge was originally constructed as a convent and moved from the centre of Blenheim to its current location in 1994. Experiences available to book onsite include private and group tours of wineries nearby as well as an expert-led wine-tasting session at The Marlborough's 'wine shack'.

What's a good recipe for Ukrainian dumplings (varenyky)?

Olia Hercules: These are my ultimate source of comfort. And if you've any varenyky left over, fry them in butter until crispy.

SERVES: 4 (MAKES 40-50) **TAKES: 1 HR 15 MINS PLUS RESTING AND COOLING**

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 150ml water
- 300-350g plain or 00 flour, plus a little extra if needed, and for dusting
- 100g salted butter, melted
- 100ml sour cream or creamy Greek yoghurt, to serve

FOR THE FILLINGS

- 150g Syr or Polish twaróg
- 1 medium egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tbsp sunflower oil
- 300g kvashena kapusta (Ukrainian sauerkraut)
- 150g potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 100g shallots, peeled and sliced
- 100g Salo or pancetta, sliced into lardons

METHOD

1. First make the dough. Combine the egg and water in a large bowl, then add 300g of the flour and mix well until it comes together. You're looking for a firm dough; if it's too sticky, gradually add the extra 50g flour, a spoonful at a time, until you get the right consistency. You may need a little more than this if it's still too sticky.
2. Turn it out onto a floured surface and knead for a few mins, until it you get a smooth, elastic dough. Wrap with cling film and chill in the fridge for 30 mins.
3. Next make your fillings. For the curd cheese filling, mix the cheese and egg in a bowl and season heavily with salt — it should be slightly oversalted. Set aside.
4. For the cabbage filling, heat the oil in a large frying pan and fry the kvashena kapusta for 5 mins. Transfer to a bowl to cool.
5. For the potato filling, place the potatoes in a saucepan over a high heat and cover with cold water. Season with salt and bring to the boil. Cook for 15 mins or until they can be easily pierced with a knife. Drain and mash them really well. Set aside.
6. Meanwhile, heat 2 tbsp oil in a frying pan over a low-medium heat. Fry the shallots for 15-20 mins, until they colour. Mix the shallots into the mashed potato and set aside.
7. Place the lardons in a dry frying pan over a medium heat and cook for 8-10 mins, until crispy. Tip into a separate bowl, reserve any fat from the pan and set aside for serving.
8. When your dough has chilled, split it in half. Flour your work surface generously. Take half the dough and roll it into a 30cm diameter circle, just less than 2mm thick. Cut into 3cm squares — you should end up with 20-25. (Don't throw away the off-cuts — you can cook them along with the stuffed pasta.) Repeat with the other half of the dough.
9. Have a well-floured tray ready. Pop 1 tsp of the cheese filling into the centre of a square. Fold in half diagonally to create a triangular dumpling and press the edges together to seal. Continue filling your varenyky, moving on to the cabbage and potato fillings. Place them on the floured tray as you go — group by filling and make sure they don't touch.
10. Add half the melted butter to one bowl and the other half to another bowl. Set aside.
11. Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil and carefully add the cheese varenyky. Boil for a couple of mins, or until they float to the surface. Drain then add to one of your butter bowls and toss to coat. Repeat for the cabbage varenyky and toss in the other bowl of butter. Finally cook the potato varenyky the same way. Drain.
12. Serve the cheese and cabbage varenyky alongside the sour cream or yoghurt. Serve the potato varenyky sprinkled with the lardons and drizzled with lardon fat.

Taken from Mamushka: Recipes from Ukraine & Beyond by Olia Hercules (£26, Mitchell Beazley)

MY LIFE IN FOOD

IDRIS ELBA

The actor discusses African cuisine, personal chefs and learning to cook with his mum

Food from Sierra Leone, where my dad's from, has been a big part of my life. Sweet potato leaf stew is something my mum would cook all the time, it was my absolute favourite. Coming home after school to those home-cooked meals is a fond memory.

I can cook. I love to make groundnut stew with chicken and I've been told it's good. It's my mum's recipe, she taught me to how cook it in the kitchen of my childhood home in London. She would talk me through all the ingredients and the importance of the cooking sequence — that's the key.

When I started making my own breakfast as a kid, that was a big deal. Although it was pretty much just cereal and using the toaster, it gave me a huge sense of pride. Maybe this is why cooking breakfast is still so important to me — I love whipping up breakfast. I was always big on food presentation, too, from a young age.

Giving up red meat has changed my relationship with food. It's made me think about alternatives a lot more. I have to get creative in the kitchen and think innovatively, because red meat was such a big part of my diet before.

The most memorable meal of my life was in Rwanda. I was making *Sometimes in April* in the capital city, Kigali, back in 2003, and we had an intense and tight seven-week shooting schedule. When you're in that situation with the same people all day every day, your downtime becomes incredibly important. One night I decided to walk around — I like veering off the tourist track to find what's good — and came across this local place doing the most amazing freshwater fish. I ordered the tilapia — it was whole and huge. It had just been steamed and stuffed with onions, garlic, herbs and hot peppers. I can still remember the whole experience of being there.

I love African cooking but Jamaica is my favourite country for food. It has so much spice and flavour. I love escovitch fish [spiced, fried fish with veg and a vinaigrette], curry chicken, festivals [sweet fried dough] and fried dumplings. I went over earlier this year to record music, and have shot two films there, so I've spent a lot of time getting to know the island.

I've eaten grilled crocodile. I'll try anything once, but that's the most unusual and adventurous thing I've had. I tried it while filming in Australia, and it was interesting on the palate because it had a chicken-like texture but tasted more like fish.

I'd order any fish dish at Pitanga. It's a small Nigerian restaurant run by Nky Iweka, close to where I live, in Fulham. Me and my wife love to visit — it's my favourite restaurant in London.

I met my personal chef at my wedding. King was brought in to cater for a particular part of the celebrations in Morocco and I loved his food immediately. We started hiring him for other special events and that soon turned into him working for me full-time. His style is an equal mix of African fusion and much-needed home comfort.

I was blown away by the beauty of the Champagne region. When me and my wife, Sabrina, visited, we went to a champagne house called Sanger. It was a sunny day and we started with an aperitif on the hillside, looking out to a horse ploughing the vineyard. We went back to the winery and I couldn't believe how many underground cellars there were. I also had a try at disgorging a bottle of champagne. It all felt so traditional. *Details of Idris Elba's wine brand, Porte Noire, and Porte Noire Restaurant and Wine Bar in London can be found at* *portenoire.co.uk* *Interview: Aleesha Hansel*

IMAGES: ALEX PIPER; GETTY; ALAMY

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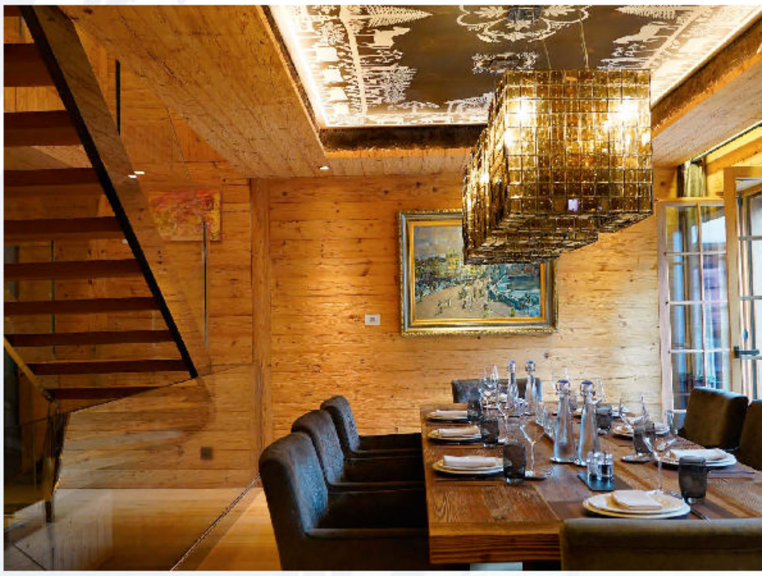

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Truckle of Blackstricks blue cheese

Whether it's southern Algeria's smooth white kemariya, Chile's sweet, salty, semi-hard chanco or pungent British stilton with its veins and pockets of green-blue mould, cheese arouses culinary passions all over the world. While its origins are hard to pinpoint, it's believed to have first been made around 7,500 years ago, with cheesemaking initially flourishing in the Middle East and Europe before gradually spreading further afield.

It's a versatile ingredient, although if you want to cook with it, you need to choose the right cheese for the job. For example, halloumi, with its high melting point and firm texture, is ideal for frying or grilling, something best exemplified by the Cypriot dish halloumi saganaki, in which the cheese is seasoned and fried until it has a crispy, golden crust. In Jammu and Kashmir, meanwhile, rounds of soft, stretchy kalari are traditionally sautéed in their own fat and eaten hot, as a street snack.

When heated, fresh, smooth cheeses create a more oozy mess than aged ones, so pick a young cheddar or gruyére for a pleasing pull or stretch; in the US, squares of mild, processed cheese are one of the go-tos for burgers and grilled cheese sandwiches; in L'Aubrac, France, however, it's the addition of semi-hard Tome de Laguiole to mashed potatoes and garlic that results in gloriously gooey aligot. As for mature cheeses, such as Italy's hard, dry parmigiano reggiano, these are generally used to add depth of flavour, either by being grated on top of a dish or incorporated in during the cooking process.

There's plenty of choice when it comes to cheesy desserts, too, whether it's a cheesecake, a carefully curated cheeseboard or a dish such as Brazil's romeu e julieta, which marries slices of fresh, white cheese — traditionally queijo minas — and guava paste for a salty, sweet end to a meal.

The following recipes showcase three of the sweet and savoury ways in which cheese is enjoyed all over the world today, a testament to what we've learned in our 7,500-year history of cheesemaking.

IMAGE: GETTY

These crispy Syrian pastry rolls can be filled with either meat or cheese. Here, they're stuffed with a mixture of mashed mozzarella and crumbled feta and flavoured with nigella seeds and fresh parsley. Traditional recipes use akkawi, a smooth and mildly salty white brine cheese from the Middle East, which is rolled into a handmade dough before the cigar-shaped savoury pastries are deep fried. This recipe is a quicker and healthier version than the original, but despite the substitutions of shop-bought pastry and cheeses that are more readily available in the UK, the end result is not dissimilar.

Sambusak — phyllo rolls with cheese filling by Anas Atassi

MAKES: 12 **TAKES: 40 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

100g mozzarella, mashed

50g feta, crumbled

small bunch of flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped

1 tsp nigella seeds

12 sheets ready-made filo pastry (15cm x 20cm each)

olive oil, for brushing

METHOD

1 Heat oven to 200C, 180C fan, gas 4.

2 Add the mozzarella, feta, parsley and nigella seeds to a bowl and stir to combine.

3 Take a sheet of pastry and lay it on your worktop, longest side closest to you. Spoon a tablespoon of the cheese filling onto the sheet, about 5cm from the bottom edge. Fold this edge over the filling and press the dough down with a few dabs of water to seal. Fold over the side edges to just meet the filling, then roll up it up away from you to form a cigar shape, about 8cm long. Seal the seams with a little water, as before. Repeat with the remaining pastry and filling to get 12 rolls.

4 Grease a baking tray with olive oil. Arrange the rolls on the tray at least ½cm apart. Brush with olive oil, then bake for 15 mins. After the halfway mark, keep an eye on them and turn if needed, so they're crisp and golden all over.

Taken from Sumac by Anas Atassi (Murdoch Books, £25)

IMAGES: JEROEN VAN DER SPEK; DAVID LOFTUS

Widely eaten across the Indian subcontinent, paneer is a soft, fresh cheese that's made by curdling cow's or buffalo's milk. Palak paneer, in which the cheese is cooked with spinach, is a classic Punjabi dish that's commonly eaten with hot chapatis. Flavoured here with fresh ginger and garlic, cumin seeds and garam masala, the dish is sometimes also known as saag paneer. This is misleading, however: in India, saag refers to a mix of fresh leafy greens such as fenugreek leaves and mustard greens as well as spinach; palak paneer contains only spinach leaves and has a milder, less bitter flavour.

Palak paneer (spinach with paneer) by Roopa Gulati

SERVES: 4-6 **TAKES: 45 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

- 250g paneer, cut into 2-3cm cubes
- 200g baby spinach leaves
- 3-4 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 4 Indian bay leaves or 4cm cinnamon stick
- 1 onion, peeled and diced
- 50g root ginger, peeled and finely grated
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 medium tomatoes, roughly chopped
- ½ tsp garam masala
- ½ tsp kashmiri chilli powder
- ¼ tsp ground turmeric
- pinch of ground asafoetida, optional

METHOD

① Put the paneer in a heatproof bowl and cover with boiling water. Leave to soak for 10 mins to soften, then drain and pat dry with kitchen paper. Set aside.

② Place a heavy-based pan over a high heat, add the spinach and cook for 1-2 mins. Transfer the wilted leaves to a food processor with a splash of boiling water. Blitz until smooth with a soft dropping consistency (you could also use a stick blender.) Set aside.

③ Add the oil to a wok and place over a medium heat. Add the cumin seeds and fry for about 30 secs, until fragrant, then add the bay leaves or cinnamon and the onion. Season with salt to taste and cook for 8-10 mins, until the onion is golden. Stir in the ginger and garlic and fry for another 1-2 mins.

④ Add the tomatoes and cook for 3-5 mins until soft, then stir through the remaining spices and the spinach paste. Heat everything through for 1-2 mins then take off the heat and add the paneer. Serve once the heat of the masala has warmed the cheese.

Taken from India: The World Vegetarian by Roopa Gulati (Bloomsbury Absolute, £20)

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Chiles rellenos are peppers — most commonly poblano peppers — that have been stuffed, dipped into an egg batter and fried. This version of the dish is a nod to the Mexican original, making use of romano peppers rather than poblano, non-traditional stuffing ingredients (replace the feta and mozzarella with queso oaxaca/quesillo if you can source it) and being neither battered nor deep-fried. You can grill the peppers up to two days in advance, and the salsa will keep for up to a week in the fridge.

Chiles rellenos with salsa roja risotto by Ixta Belfrage

SERVES: 4 **TAKES: 1 HR 15 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

- 8 red romano peppers
- 200g short-grain brown rice, soaked for at least 2 hrs (preferably overnight)
- 300g feta, crumbled
- 200g buffalo mozzarella, drained, patted dry and torn into medium chunks
- olive oil, for drizzling
- 2 spring onions, trimmed and julienned
- 5g fresh coriander leaves
- 2 limes, cut into wedges, to serve

FOR THE SALSA ROJA

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 15g unsalted butter
- 1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely grated
- 300g sweet, ripe cherry tomatoes
- ½ dried ancho chilli
- 1 dried habanero chilli (or a pinch of regular/ chipotle chilli flakes, for milder heat)
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp coriander seeds
- 2 tsp tomato purée

METHOD

① Heat grill to the highest setting.

② Cut a slit along one side of each pepper, keeping them attached at the top and bottom. Arrange the peppers slit-side up on a rack set over a baking tray. Grill until soft and blackened in patches, about 7 mins, then turn the peppers and grill for another 4-8 mins, until that side is soft and blackened too. Keep an eye on them, as they may be ready sooner if your grill runs hot. Set the peppers aside and leave to cool on the rack, slit-side down so any liquid drains away. Turn off the grill.

③ Drain the soaked rice and put into a medium saucepan with 450ml cold water. Place over a medium-high heat and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low, cover with a lid, and cook for 25 mins. Remove from the heat and leave to rest for 10 mins with the lid still on.

④ Meanwhile, make the salsa roja. Put everything except the tomato purée into a large sauté pan and add 1 tsp salt. Place over a medium-high heat and fry, stirring often, for 15 mins, until the tomatoes have broken down and the onions are soft and golden-brown. Reduce the heat if the mixture starts to catch or burn.

⑤ Pick out the habanero, if using, then transfer the salsa to a blender with 120ml water and the tomato purée. Blitz until completely smooth, then return it to the pan and set aside.

⑥ Turn the grill back on to its highest setting.

⑦ Mix the feta and mozzarella together in a bowl. Transfer the peppers from the rack to a foil-lined tray. Peel some of the skin off — just the bits that tear away easily (you don't want to rip a hole in the peppers). Pat the insides dry and season with a pinch of salt. Stuff the peppers with the cheese, then sprinkle with a little flaked salt and drizzle over a little oil. You can prepare the peppers up to this point up to 4 hrs ahead.

⑧ Grill for 7-9 mins near the top of the oven, until the cheese is bubbling and browned in patches. Set aside.

⑨ Finish the rice, working quickly, so the melted cheese in the peppers doesn't harden. Add the cooked rice to the pan with the salsa roja, stir together and gently heat through for 1 min. The texture should be that of a loose, saucy risotto; add a splash of water if it's looking thick.

⑩ Spoon the risotto onto a platter and then top it with the peppers. Finish with the spring onions and coriander, squeeze over some lime and serve.

From MEZCLA: Recipes to Excite by Ixta Belfrage (Ebury Press, £26.00)

IMAGE: YUKI SUGIARA

On the menu

FROM A CLASSIC SOUFFLE IN PARIS TO POUTINE IN LIVERPOOL, HERE ARE SOME OF THE BEST CHEESE DISHES FOUND ON MENUS AROUND THE WORLD

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SKIN ON FRIES, CHEESE CURDS & HOMEMADE GRAVY
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WATER 1
BEERS £3.50
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FRIED EGG £1
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SOUFFLÉ HENRI IV, SAUCE VOLAILLE AUX CHAMPIGNONS

Le Soufflé, Paris

Serving up seasonal soufflés since 1961, Paris' Le Soufflé offers both sweet and savoury creations. The Soufflé Henri IV is a house classic — a cheese soufflé that comes with a gravy boat of creamy chicken and mushroom sauce to pour on top. Available both à la carte or as part of a three-course soufflé menu. €19 (£16.67) lesouffle.fr

MIXED CHEESE PLOUGHMAN'S

Crown Inn, Somerset

The ploughman's lunch as we know it today first became popular in the 1960s, when the Milk Marketing Board pushed it as an attempt to increase national cheese sales. At the Crown Inn, it features Wookey Hole cave-aged cheddar, Somerset brie and Cropwell Bishop stilton, with thick slices of bread, sweet pickle, a pickled onion, grapes and homemade coleslaw. £9.75 crowninnchurchill.co.uk

TEQUEÑOS

El Rincón de la Abuela Venezolana, Barcelona

Said to have originated in the Venezuelan town of Los Teques, and sometimes known as 'deditos de queso', these salty cheese sticks are wrapped in dough and then baked or fried in oil. They're also popular in Spain, and at the family-run Venezuelan restaurant El Rincón de la Abuela Venezolana in Barcelona, they also offer coeliac-friendly versions made with cornflour or plantain, and a tofu-filled option for vegans. From €7.90 (£6.93) elrincondelaabuelavenezolana.com

PHILLY CHEESESTEAK

Bazaar Meat by José Andrés, Chicago

The classic Philly cheesesteak is a long roll stuffed with sliced or chopped beef that's been freshly sautéed or griddled, melted Cheez Whiz, provolone or American cheese and, optionally, caramelised onions. For a creative alternative, try Bazaar Meat in Chicago, where chef Alex Pitts' version sees thin slices of Kobe tenderloin delicately draped across a hollow airbread (a sort of puffed-up pita) filled with cheddar foam and topped with onion jam. $13 (£11.74) thebazaar.com

Crown Inn's mixed cheese ploughman's

Above: Caribou Poutine in Liverpool

POUTINE

Caribou Poutine, Liverpool

This comforting dish originated in Quebec in the 1950s, but it's popularity has since spread. In its purist form, it's a combination of salty cheese curds and rich gravy on French fries, although these days it gets loaded with just about anything. At Liverpool's Caribou Poutine, you can either stick to tradition, or garnish with toppings such as fried chicken coated in maple syrup or pulled pork with jalapeños and sour cream. From £4.95 cariboupoutine.co.uk

RACLETTE

Château de Villa, Valais

Legend has it that a winemaker from the Swiss canton of Valais invented raclette one evening after heating a piece of cheese on his wood fire. Today, the cheese dairies here produce raclette cheese, which has protected designation of origin, from local raw milk, according to an ancestral recipe. At the 16th-century Château de Villa in Sierre, raclette is presented as a tasting of five Valais cheeses served with potatoes, gherkins and pickled onions. Raclette tasting of five cheeses costs CHF36 (£32.60) per person chateaudevilla.ch

ADJARULI KHACHAPURI

Little Georgia, London

This version of khachapuri, Georgia's leavened cheese bread, hails from the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, on the coast of the Black Sea. Open-faced and boat-shaped, it's filled with a combination of curds and cheeses and baked with an egg on top. Head to London's Little Georgia, and once your adjaruli khachapuri arrives, tear a chunk off the thick crust and dip it in. £12.50 littlegeorgia.co.uk

LOCAL CULTURES

The Conservatory, Cape Town

For many, there's no better way to round off a meal than with a platter of good cheese. The Local Cultures cheese board at Cape Town's The Conservatory, in the five-star The Cellars-Hohenort hotel, features a selection of four local, artisanal cheeses. Sit in the restaurant's idyllic gardens and enjoy the likes of a traditional brushed-rind, Swiss-style hard cheese, an award-winning gorgonzola and a smooth, creamy semi-soft, washed-rind chevin, all served with homemade preserves and crackers. R165 (£8.22) thecellars-hohenorthotel.com

IMAGES: THE CROWN INN; CARIBOU POUTINE

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EMILE VAN DER STAAK

THE PIONEER

IMAGES: DUNCAN DE FEY

Dutch kimchi served with Japanese mountain asparagus grown in Ketelbroek Food Forest

AT HIS NETHERLANDS RESTAURANT, DE NIEUWE WINKEL, CHEF EMILE VAN DER STAAK IS REDEFINING FINE DINING BY TURNING HIS BACK ON MEAT IN FAVOUR OF PLANTS GROWN IN A NEARBY ‘FOOD FOREST’. WORDS: ELLIE SEYMOUR

“It’s not unusual for guests to feel emotional when they discover the story behind our food,” says Emile van der Staak. “Not to mention when they taste it. One person even cried with happiness.” The setting for these tear-jerking scenes? De Nieuwe Winkel, Van der Staak’s restaurant in the Dutch city of Nijmegen. Here, he and his team create experimental vegetarian food using an array of herbs, roots, flowers, nuts and plants — some common, others less so. Chestnuts are turned into fudge and combined with seitan to form kebabs, tulip bulbs are fermented and made into miso, pine needles flavour dainty sweets, and green sunflower seeds are used instead of rice in risotto.

Most of these ingredients come from Ketelbroek Food Forest, a six-acre plot in the village of Groesbeek, eight miles from the restaurant. To the untrained eye, it resembles an ordinary wood, dense with trees and shrubs. But there’s one key difference: everything in it is edible. It was set up in 2009 by Dutch botanist and environmental activist Wouter van Eck as an experiment in slow farming, to see what would happen if the right combination of edible perennials were planted together and left to grow like a natural forest, without pesticides.

“It’s the first ‘food forest’ of its kind in Europe and we’re one of the few restaurants around the world collaborating in this way,” says Van der Staak. “We have more than 400 different species of edible plants that we plan our menus around, such as peach, pawpaw and Japanese plums. And nut trees like chestnut, hazelnut, walnut, heartnut and hickory.”

Van der Staak and Van Eck have grown some plants they previously knew little or nothing about, such as Japanese mountain asparagus and Chinese mahogany — a plant with leaves that taste like onion. Van der Staak harvests the ingredients and, with his fellow chefs, works them into beautifully presented three-, six- or nine-course tasting menus, served in an informal, modern dining room hidden in the backstreets of Nijmegen.

“To us, fine dining is not about the status of a restaurant, its location, expensive designer interior, fancy cutlery and wine list,” says Van der Staak. “It’s about adding value through creativity and using ingredients nobody knows of, which are grown with acute attention to detail.” However, he adds, luxury cooking can be about elevating everyday ingredients, too: “When you start looking at cooking in this way, who’s going to tell me caviar, for example, is more valuable than a carrot grown and nurtured by someone with specialist knowledge of specific varieties?”

In 2021, De Nieuwe Winkel was awarded a Michelin Star, along with a Michelin Green Star for its sustainability efforts. In spring 2022, another Michelin Star was added. “It is, of course, a huge compliment to achieve [these accolades],” says Van der Staak. “But we still

Emile van der Staak visits the Food Forest

like to follow our own course and are always experimenting with new methods." As a result of his innovative approach — and relatively accessible starting price point (three courses from €65) — Van der Staak says the restaurant has a younger customer base than classic fine-dining establishments. "We attract people who would not usually eat at a traditional luxury restaurant," he says. "We want as many people as possible to come and enjoy what we do."

Despite his dedication to gastronomy, Van der Staak wasn't always set for a career as a chef. Born and raised in a small village in the southern Netherlands, he initially trained as a civil engineer. "My grandfather had several restaurants. My mother said: 'You will never work in the hospitality industry, because he worked himself to death.'" Undeterred, he entered his first professional kitchen at the age of 14, initially as a dishwasher, but it wasn't until he was at university that he realised he found his part-time job more enjoyable than his studies. He dropped out on the day of his final exams and became a chef. "I realised I was never going to work as an engineer," he says. "So I got up and walked away."

He went on to hone his culinary skills at ROC Eindhoven vocational college, before moving to Amsterdam in 2000, where he worked in some of the Netherlands' best restaurants. It wasn't long before he felt the strain of life in the city's kitchens, though, and in 2006 moved with his girlfriend to Nijmegen, where she'd grown up. He took a job in a local restaurant until he could open his own place.

De Nieuwe Winkel launched in 2011, though initially the menu wasn't exactly meat-free. "I'd always imagined going vegetarian, but for some reason, we felt that we weren't yet good enough and were also afraid of losing guests," he says. "We reduced the amount of meat we served over time until it was nothing more than a garnish."

He began collaborating with the Food Forest in 2014, and the decision to move away from meat entirely came five years later, when Wouter van Eck suggested trying a vegetarian menu one evening. None of Van der Staak's fears about alienating his customers were realised. "Of course, nobody was disappointed — it's about good food," he says. When the Michelin-starred New York restaurant Eleven Madison Park remained successful after going vegan overnight, that was the push he needed. "This gave me the confidence and inspiration in 2021 to work without animal protein, [and we plan] to become vegan eventually," he says.

The idea is for the menu to be fully plant-based within a year. "If we can find an alternative to butter and the cheese course, the rest will be easy," says Van der Staak. "The burned butter is one of the best things we serve, but we plan to test a vegan version of this. For the cheese course, we're using almonds and fermentation to get the same feel and flavour of a young cheese, and oats to create another one."

Experimentation is extremely important to Van der Staak, who recently expanded his team of 11 chefs to include someone whose job is solely to test out new ingredients and ideas. As for the future, he hopes to open an outdoor restaurant in the next five years. "But for now," he says, "the most important thing for us is to continue focusing on how [our] plants are being grown, and the perennial system we're using in the Food Forest." ◘

Signature dishes

SEAWEED & ALGAE
For this starter, two different varieties of sea plant are used to make a delicately flavoured, vibrant blue broth. Seaweed foraged in the waters of the Oosterschelde Estuary, in the southwestern Netherlands, is cured and combined with fresh algae cultivated in Rotterdam. In the broth sit fine slices of pickled vegetables and a drizzle of sea-lettuce oil.

CHESTNUT SATAY
This vegan twist on chicken satay is made of chestnuts left to ferment for up to 48 hours. The process binds them together into a dense cake that can then be cut into cubes and skewered. They're glazed in a rich sauce made with unripe Szechuan berries, Chinese mahogany, Japanese plums and dark beer, before being cooked over a barbecue.

FOREST FLOOR
Van der Staak created this no-chocolate mousse almost by accident, after growing a fruity-scented fungal culture on chestnuts. One of his chefs added cream to the roasted fungus and they found it tasted just like chocolate. The cream has since been replaced with tofu to make the dessert vegan, and other unlikely ingredients have also been added, including porcini mushrooms preserved in sugar, and sliced candied pinecones.

IMAGES: DUNCAN DE FEY

ENTICING CULINARY ADVENTURES

Spanning three interconnected islands, and a short 45-minute yacht journey away from Malé International Airport, Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi is an iconic resort paradise surrounded by the natural beauty of the Maldivian landscape and the crystal-clear Indian Ocean. The resort takes guests on an unforgettable culinary journey across its 11 speciality dining venues serving the freshest produce in extraordinary settings – the diversity of which is a first for the Maldives. Aside from the excellent restaurants and bars, the island also boasts 119 spacious villas, kid's and teen's clubs and a world-class spa.

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OPPERS.

If winter is a time for comfort food, then grand desserts are the ultimate seasonal indulgence. Whether it's mille crepe cakes in Japan or schwarzwälder kirschtorte in Germany, so many cultures have their own signature showstoppers — those sweet centrepieces made to be shared and synonymous with celebration. Some, like Sweden's Budapest roll, evoke a sense of nostalgia; others, like Viennese sachertorte, have a complex history; while some, like France's croquembouche, are symbols of excess. So, whether you're planning a trip to one of the world's dessert capitals, or you simply want some kitchen inspiration, check out our selection and satisfy your sweet tooth this winter.

IMAGE: STOCKFOOD

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THE ULTIMATE TEA CAKE

A successful marriage of French technique and Japanese flavours, the matcha mille crepe cake is delicate, balanced masterpiece. Words: Manami Narita

Making our Mille Crêpes cakes is a time-consuming process. We mix our own matcha powder and we whip our own cream and each cake is hand-assembled. Every cake has multiple steps and they each require special techniques from our experienced team of bakers.

We source the highest-quality ingredients to use in our cakes, including our ceremonial-grade matcha from Japan. This fragrant matcha offers the perfect balance of sweetness and bitterness. We delicately dust it on top of our Green Tea Mille Crêpes for an incredible burst of flavour in each bite.

Matcha can be tricky to work. This is because it must remain extremely fresh to retain its bright flavour and vibrant colour. The powder is very delicate, which means the smell, taste, and colour can all fade very quickly. But I think what makes matcha desserts so special is that everyone from adults to children can enjoy them. Matcha has such a unique flavour, but it's loved by so many people, which is what makes it so exciting to use.

With French desserts being enjoyed at the end of the meal, they tend to be more robust in flavour. Japanese sweets, on the other hand, are usually enjoyed as snacks throughout the day, so most desserts are light and not too sweet. But while the two cultures have different approaches, the quality of ingredients is very important to both. For example, milk, flour and fruit are all usually extremely high quality for both French and Japanese desserts. It's what makes French and Japanese pastry techniques go together in perfect harmony.

Right now, I'm really enjoying making our Butter Pecan Mille Crêpes cake. It's a new cake that we're launching in October for the holiday season. This is exciting to me because pecan nuts aren't very common in Japan, and because of that, I wasn't introduced to them until after I came to the US. I tasted butter pecan ice cream for the first time in New York and I absolutely loved it!

Manami Narita is pastry chef at Lady M, a luxury confections brand with more than 50 boutiques worldwide.

From left: Customers queue outside Lady M store in Shanghai, China; berry trifle

Previous pages: A slice of opera cake

IMAGES: ALAMY; STOCKFOOD

THE PERFECT TRIFLE

This Christmas classic works best with fresh berries, homemade sponge and a generous glug of sherry. Words: Richard Bainbridge

Richard Bainbridge is chef patron at Benedicts in London. His dessert, Nanny Bush's trifle, featured on the Great British Menu. restaurantbenedicts.com

CREAM: Instead of using the squirty cream out of a can or whipping cream, I'd suggest making a creme diplomat, which is a rich, indulgent cream that holds its shape. To make it, add gelatine to custard, then fold in semi-whipped cream to give your trifle a beautiful finish.

INGREDIENTS: It's hugely important to buy the best berries you can for your trifle, from the strawberries for the jelly to the layer of raspberries. Ask your greengrocer about the produce. The taste and flavour of seasonal, local produce will make all the difference.

SHERRY: I love the potent flavour of sherry coming through the trifle when added to our creme anglaise custard layer made with fresh vanilla. I'd always suggest using Harveys Bristol Cream Sherry as it's a classic English flavour and gives the trifle a decadent, boozy kick.

GELATINE: Don't be nervous about gelatine; use one leaf to every 100g of jelly or custard. This enables the trifle to be freestanding and allows it to be sliced or scooped neatly. I use bronze gelatine sheets — they have the perfect set and retain the clarity of the jelly.

THE SPONGE: I suggest making your own Genoise sponge as a base for all your layers to sit upon. It's easy to make and has a great flavour. You'll really notice the difference if you use homemade sponge and avoid the artificial flavour of shop-bought sponge fingers.

JELLY: Use frozen English strawberries, which pack great flavour, and make it with equal quantities of fruit and stock syrup. You can also add essences of rose or fresh mint to add flavour. And if you use 100g of liquor to one gelatine leaf, it will ensure a beautiful set.

THE FINISH: A freestanding trifle is a real showstopper. Use a pie case, dish or metal mould. Layer the sponge, berries, jelly and custard, and then set. Slice your trifle at this point, then pipe whipped cream on top and garnish with hundreds and thousands and sprigs of fresh mint.

THE COFFEEHOUSE CAKE

Vienna's beloved and beautiful sachertorte is served in cafes all across the city, and even sparked a lengthy legal battle. Words: Summer Rylander

Not one crumb is out of place on Café Sacher's sachertorte. A slick of smooth apricot jam is sandwiched between two layers of neat chocolate sponge, the whole thing cloaked in a precisely 4mm-thick layer of chocolate glaze before it's cut into perfectly neat wedges. And it ought to be perfect; this is, after all, a cake so precious to Viennese culinary culture that for years it was at the heart of a legal battle.

Dating back to 1832, the recipe was created when a 16-year-old court kitchen apprentice named Franz Sacher found himself having to create a dessert fit for royalty. Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich had requested an impressive finish to a meal for his esteemed guests, and with a poorly head chef, the task fell to young Franz. It's said that Prince Metternich expressed hope he wouldn't be 'disgraced' by dessert — and he wasn't. The cake was a hit, and it soon garnered fans beyond the royal court.

Nearly two centuries later, I'm sitting on a red-trimmed banquette at Café Sacher — a quintessentially grand Viennese coffeehouse, within Hotel Sacher. I sip a coffee, taking in the crystal chandeliers, high ceilings and gold accents while I wait for my slice of 'original sachertorte' — a name backed by both legend and law. Franz Sacher may have created this dessert, but his son, Eduard, honed the recipe during an apprenticeship at Vienna's Demel confectionery. After Eduard opened Hotel Sacher in 1876 with sachertorte on the menu, the cake's popularity soared. Over the decades that followed, however, the question of which establishment — Demel or Hotel Sacher — could lay claim to the 'original' version turned into a long, drawn-out legal battle, ending in an out-of-court settlement in 1963.

"It was a good day for Hotel Sacher," Mattias Winkler, CEO of Sacher Hotels and head of the sachertorte baking facility, tells me. "There are probably millions of different Sacher cakes on this planet, but there's only one original." Demel, meanwhile, is permitted to market its version as the 'Eduard Sacher Torte'.

A precision-cut piece of cake is placed in front of me and I hear a neighbouring diner squeal, "Oh, it's so good!" as she tucks into her own slice. I pick up my fork and break the silky surface, and for this first bite I forgo

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES

the unsweetened whipped cream that accompanies any classically prepared sachertorte. The sponge is yielding and moist; there's a subtle note of apricot and a rich chocolate flavour.

With such controversy surrounding it, it seems only fair to try the sachertorte at Demel, too, a short, scenic stroll from Hotel Sacher that takes me past the Spanish Riding School and the 14th-century Augustinian Church. Grey skies haven't deterred the crowds — there's a lengthy queue, but my waiting time is blessedly brief, thanks to my willingness to sit outside. Through the windows, I can see the warm glow of Demel's many globe-like lamps, suspended from ornate ceilings. Sitting inside offers better views of the display cabinets lined with beautifully precise desserts — but for that privilege you have to queue.

Swathed in the scent of sausages and pancakes and sheltered by an awning, I dig into a slice of sachertorte. The sponge is drier, a fact perhaps more noticeable because — unlike the Café Sacher version, which has apricot jam between sponge layers — Demel's only has a jam below the glaze. The jam itself is also slightly sweeter, offsetting the distinct, but not unpleasant, bitterness of the chocolate.

That's the thing about this cake. There are countless variations, and which one is 'best' is a matter of personal preference — but Café Sacher has to stick to the tried-and-tested formula. "The moment we change anything with the recipe, we lose our ability to say we have the original sachertorte," Mattias tells me. "We may be taking steps to modernise certain things around the hotel, but a few things will not be changed — one of these is the recipe for the cake."

Not all Viennese bakers are so bound by tradition, however. Sachertorte can be found everywhere, from tiny snack kiosks to centuries-old cafes, and while most take a fairly classic approach, some are pushing boundaries. Gabriele Danek, of Simply Raw Bakery, is among them. Her sachertorte is raw, vegan and gluten-free. "If you run a confectionery in Vienna, the sachertorte is, of course, part of that," she tells me after I happen upon her small shop on Drahtgasse. "I love to turn traditional recipes into nutritious, plant-based variations."

There's a chandelier overhead, but with its patterned floor tiles, greenery and vintage-style furniture, Simply Raw has none of the formality of Demel and Café Sacher. It's an environment that suits Gabriele's modern interpretation of the sachertorte, which begins with a base of walnuts, oat flour and dates, before the necessary apricot jam and chocolate glaze are introduced. The result is visually recognisable as a sachertorte, and contains the familiar flavours, but with a pleasantly chewy texture; it's wholesome, but doesn't feel like a wilfully healthy substitute.

As my cafe crawl continues, I wonder if this cake is eaten often by people who actually live in Vienna, or whether it's more of a 'thing' among tourists. "If you live here, you don't queue in the rain to eat sachertorte, but it's part of Vienna for sure," says Caroline Rötzer, an apprentice at Hotel Sacher. "You can taste the history when you eat it — it's just a special feeling."

HOW TO DO IT: To travel by rail from London St Pancras, take the Eurostar to Brussels, then a Nightjet sleeper onwards to Vienna. Airlines including Ryanair, Wizz Air and Austrian serve Vienna from various UK airports. Hotel Sacher offers doubles from €500 (£440), room only. sacher.com wien.info/en

S
Sacher
Eck

From left: Opera House, Kartner Ring, Vienna; Sacher chocolate cake with cream served at Cafe Sacher, Vienna; the terrace of the cafe at Hotel Sacher

timeline

1832
Franz Sacher creates the sachertorte for Prince Metternich

1876
Eduard Sacher opens Hotel Sacher and sells the sachertorte he perfected at Demel

1858
Katharina Prato publishes *Die Süddeutsche Küche* with a recipe for 'Chocolade-torte à la Sacher'

1963
The legal dispute over whether Sacher or Demel can lay claim to the original sachertorte is settled in favour of Sacher

2012
Simply Raw Bakery launches a raw, vegan sachertorte

2022
In March, filming begins at Hotel Sacher on an Amazon Prime Video production called *Sachertorte*

THE ORIGINAL CHERRY GATEAU

The inspiration for Black Forest gateau, Schwarzwälder kirschtorte is enjoyed all over Germany, especially during an afternoon coffee break. Words: Christie Dietz

Clouds of whipped cream loaded with thick curls of bitter chocolate, kirsch-soaked chocolate sponge, pockets of tart, juicy black cherries and a thin, crumbly pastry base: Schwarzwälder kirschtorte ('Black Forest cherry torte') is, for many non-Germans, the quintessential German cake. A speciality of the Black Forest region in Germany's southwest, it's enjoyed on special occasions and in generous slices as part of the country's traditional 3pm coffee and cake ritual — often referred to as the fourth meal of the day.

It's an extravagant cake, but one that's beautifully balanced in flavour and texture, and for all its chocolate, cream and cherries, not too sweet. The origins of its name are hard to pin down: some believe the chocolate shavings are a tribute to the deep, dark Black Forest, while others suggest the cake represents the region's traditional women's folk costume, the chocolate portraying their

From left: Schwarzwälder kirschtorte at Der Kuchenladen; exterior of Der Kuchenladen; dobos torta

Der Kuchenladen
Der Kuchenladen
handmade cakes, cupcakes & tarts
DER KUCHENLADEN - Torten - Kuchen - Cupcakes

where to find it

CAFÉ MALDANER, WIESBADEN
This grand, 160-year-old Viennese coffee house is renowned for the spectacular contents of its glistening domed cake counter. Reservations are a must. Slice, €4.80 (£4.10). maldaner1859.de

DER KUCHENLADEN, BERLIN
A cosy cafe in one of Berlin's most elegant areas, which offers both traditionally German layered cakes and creative, modern bakes. Slice, €4.50 (£3.85). derkuchenladen.de

CAFÉ SCHMIDT, FREIBURG
This traditional cafe in the heart of Freiburg's historic Old Town serves what locals consider to be the best Schwarzwälder kirschtorte in town. Eat in, €4.70 (£4); takeaway €4 (£3.45). cafeschmidt.de

KONDITOREI WIDMANN, MUNICH
This French-style coffee house, confectionery and cafe sells an enormous selection of seasonal cakes, tarts and pastries, all made in-house. Slice, €4.20 (£3.60). konditorei-widmann.de

CAFÉ GOLDENE KRONE, ST MÄRGEN
In the Black Forest, an all-women team run this cafe in what was once a monastery hostel, using sustainable, regional ingredients for their sweet and savoury dishes. Slice, €3.90 (£3.35). cafe-goldene-krone.de

IMAGES: DER KUCHENLADEN; STOCKFOOD

black dresses, the white cream their blouses, and the cherries the enormous red woollen pom-poms on their broad-brimmed hats.

Another suggestion is that the cake's name honours one of its key ingredients, Schwarzwälder kirschwasser, a smooth, aromatic kirsch, or cherry brandy, that has a bitter almond note and Protected Geographical Indication. Black Forest sour cherries are fermented and distilled into the strong, clear drink at small, rural distilleries, and true Schwarzwälder kirschtortes — as per the cake's protected status as a Guaranteed Traditional Speciality — must include it.

The origins of the cake are equally difficult to pinpoint. Given the strong sense of cultural identity and nostalgia it evokes in the Black Forest today, locals might be forgiven for responding unkindly to any suggestion that its birthplace lies beyond the region's foothills. In the 1800s, preserved cherries were mixed with cream and kirsch and served as a dessert here, but the earliest evidence of a cake incorporating those same ingredients seems to come from Bonn, where confectioner Josef Keller claimed to have first baked it — or at least a less complex version of it — in 1915. Regardless of where it was invented, by the 1930s Schwarzwälder kirschtorte was being enjoyed at patisseries in large cities across Germany. Such lavish teatime treats were popular with the middle classes, and the spectacular Schwarzwälder kirschtorte embodied the grandiose spirit of the time.

The elegant, boozy cake made its way to Britain, where it dropped its hard-to-pronounce German name and expensive kirsch. By the 1970s, Black Forest gateau had become a firm favourite on dessert menus and at dinner parties alongside prawn cocktails and cheese and pineapple on sticks. However, during the cake's rise to fame, something was lost in translation, and the British version became a poor imitation of its German namesake. With a dry sponge drenched with sickly cherry syrup, layered with artificial cream and topped with shiny red glacé cherries and cheap chocolate sprinkles, it evolved from an indulgent treat into a mass-produced, frozen dessert.

Those who fondly remember the Black Forest gateau's Sara Lee era seem to be few and far between, and yet the cake in its retro configuration is frequently heralded as iconic, perhaps out of nostalgia for 1970s and 80s kitsch. In the UK today, the Black Forest lends its name to a plethora of bakes and puddings, the core ingredients incorporated into everything from cupcakes and brownies to trifles and pavlovas. The cake itself is once again making appearances on dining tables, largely during the festive season and — thanks to the availability of good chocolate, quality jarred cherries, proper cream and affordable kirsch — without irony. It's perhaps not too much of a stretch to suggest that the Black Forest gateau is coming full circle and heading back towards its German roots — wherever they might be.

FOUR TO TRY

layered cakes

Dobos torta
This Hungarian cake, also known as dobosh, has several thin layers of sponge and chocolate buttercream and a hard, shiny caramel topping. It's named after Budapest pastry chef and delicatessen owner József Dobos, who invented it in 1884.

Southern coconut cake
There's no definitive recipe for this special celebration cake from the American South. Coated with white frosting and coconut flakes, the three simple butter cake layers might be flavoured with almond, coconut or vanilla, and incorporate a lemon or pineapple filling.

Opera cake
This elegant Parisian cake comprises six layers of nutty almond sponge soaked with coffee syrup, smooth coffee buttercream and a rich chocolate ganache. It's finished with a chocolate glaze and the word 'Opera' is traditionally piped on top.

Vínarterta
Also known as lagkaka, randalín and lagterta, this Icelandic cake's most common name — Vienna Cake — reflects its Austrian roots. The exact ingredients are hotly debated, but its most common form combines alternating thin layers of shortbread biscuit and buttercream or prune jam.

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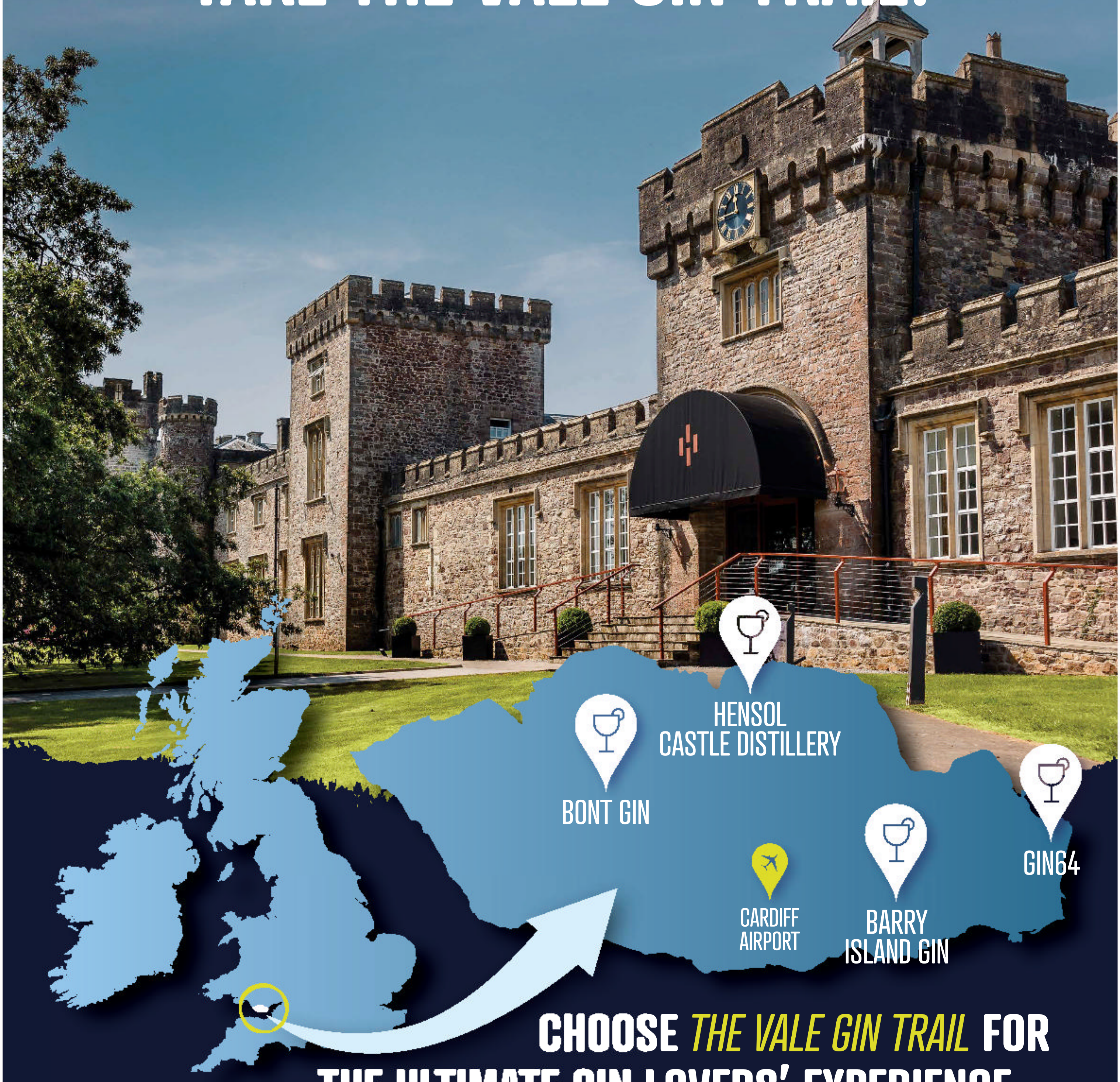

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THE FRENCH WEDDING DESSERT

Few desserts live up to the title of showstopper quite like le croquembouche, a tower of cream-filled choux buns. Words: Carolyn Boyd

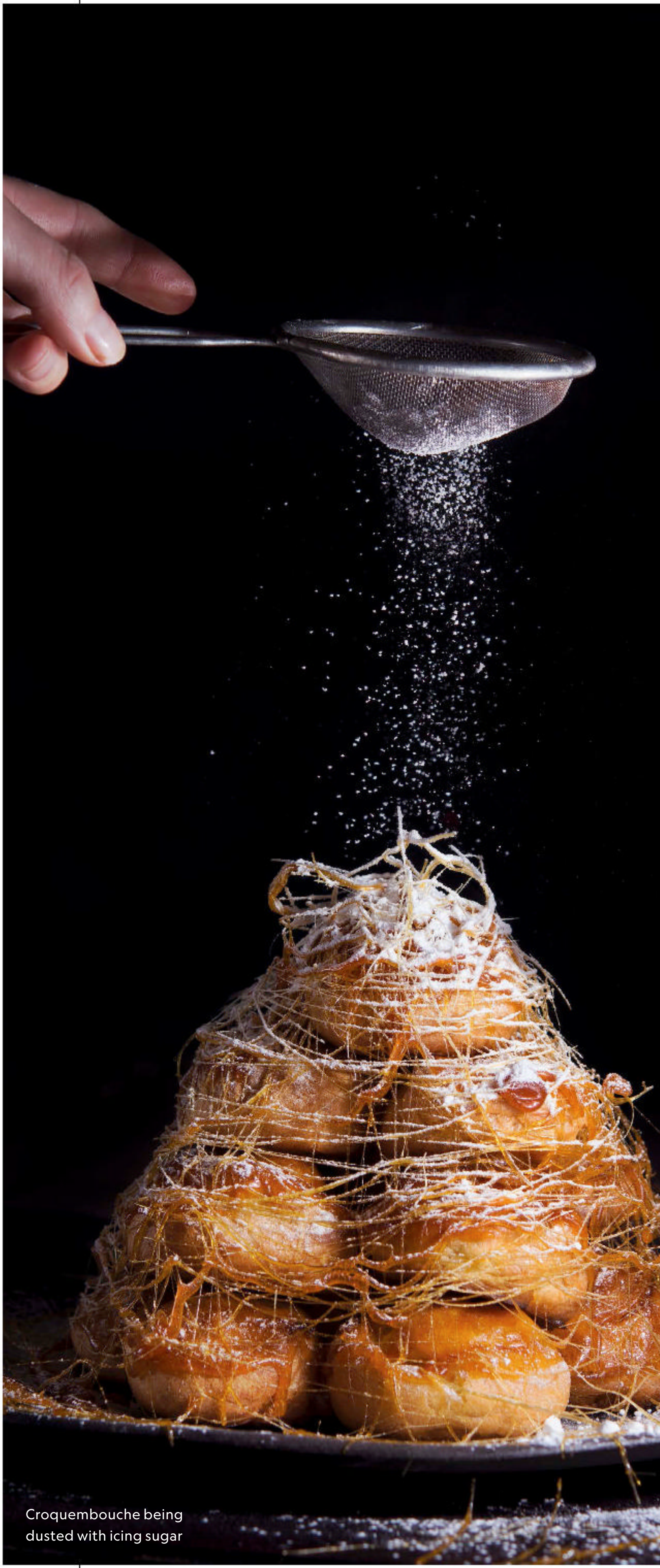
Choux pastry comes in many guises, from eclairs to profiteroles, chouquettes to gougères. But for maximum wow factor, nothing compares to le croquembouche. This ostentatious showstopper is essentially a towering cone of choux pastry puffs, each filled with creme patissiere, woven together with caramel and resting on a nougatine base shaped like a crown. Made for sharing, it's served on special occasions.

Its origins lie with one of the founders of classic French cuisine, Marie-Antonin Carême, who, in the early 19th century, worked as chef for the influential French diplomat and gourmand Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord. According to expert pastry chef Fabrice Danniel, from Cordon Bleu Institute in Paris, Carême's first versions consisted of pyramids of fruits and nuts held together with caramel: "People would take a piece of fruit and put it in their mouths, and that's how it got its name [croquembouche translates as 'crunch in the mouth']." The dessert later evolved into the 'Pièce Montée', one of Carême's signature creations, which was a pyramid of choux pastries stuck together with caramel.

Due to its complexity, croquembouche tends to be the preserve of expert patissiers and must be ordered ahead of time. The upside of this is that there's usually time to have it tailored to tastes, with pastry cream flavoured with kirsch, vanilla or lemon. Once the nougatine base is ready, each choux puff is added carefully to a central cone, made from metal or card. It's a tricky task, and one Fabrice sets for his intermediate-level trainees. "Students must have dexterity, exactitude and creativity — it's almost like architecture," he says. "We add the pastries to the cone, and go up level by level, with each one becoming narrower. It really does feel like an achievement.

"You have to bear in mind the humidity of where you're making it," he adds. "It needs to be a very dry environment so that the caramel doesn't soften. Also, prepare the choux pastry the day before it's needed so that they're drier and stick together more easily."

The effort is worth it, though, with the presentation of the croquembouche often one of the most anticipated moments at a wedding. "It's something of a ritual to have the bride and groom cut through the sugar and serve the pastries. This used to be ritual enough in days gone by, but now we can even add fireworks for extra effect," says Fabrice.



Croquembouche being dusted with icing sugar

IMAGE: STOCKFOOD

A CHOICE OF CHEESECAKES

Few desserts have travelled as well as the cheesecake, with beloved versions found all over the globe, from Germany to Japan. Words: Jenny Linford

New York cheesecake

The creation of this baked American version is credited to Arnold Reuben — who was owner of Reuben's Restaurant and Deli in Manhattan, and creator of the eponymous sandwich — in the 1920s. Its chief component is cream cheese (industrially produced, spreadable soft cheese was a 19th-century US invention), while the base is usually made from graham cracker crumbs, with eggs, sugar, double cream and soured cream the other classic elements. The results are smooth and rich.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Head to Junior's, founded in Brooklyn in 1950, for a slice of its famous version. juniorscheesecake.com

Smaland ostkaka

While there are plenty of regional variations of Sweden's beloved cheesecake, Smaland ostkaka, from the south, is the best known. Traditionally, the first step is to curdle large quantities of fresh milk with rennet to produce curd cheese, with great care taken to source good milk from a reputable farm. The curds are drained and mixed with ground and chopped almonds, eggs, cream and a little sugar, and then baked until golden. It's served with whipped cream and a fruit jam, such as cloudberry or sour cherry.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Asens Culture Village in Smaland is a preserved traditional settlement, showcasing life between 1900 and 1920. Its cafe is an idyllic spot for a slice of Smaland ostkaka. visitsmaland.se

Sernik

In Poland, sernik is a celebratory cheesecake, and very much a Christmas treat. It's made from twarog or biały ser, a traditional fresh white cheese made from cow's milk, which has a delicate sour tang that's crucial to the dish's flavour. It's baked on a shortcrust pastry base rather than a biscuit base, and sometimes raisins or chopped candied peel are added to enrich the cheese filling.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Warsaw's Café Bristol is a civilised spot for a slice of sernik. cafebristol.pl

Peynirli kunefe

This Turkish cheesecake offers a distinctive combination of textures and flavours. It comprises a layer of unsalted cheese, sometimes enriched with kaymak (Turkish clotted cream), sandwiched between two layers of fine pastry strands called tel kadaif, which have been coated in melted butter so that they stick together. It's baked until golden brown, covered with lemony syrup and a sprinkle of pistachios, and served hot, so the cheese between the pastry layers is gooey and stretchy.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Try one of Turkish chef CZN Burak's Hatay Civilizations Table restaurants, which all serve this traditional dessert. m.hataymedeniyetlersofrasi.com.tr

Basque cheesecake

With its striking appearance when baked to a burnished, dark brown colour — hence its full name, 'Basque burnt cheesecake' — and elegant, silky-smooth texture, this truly stylish cheesecake has plenty of fans around the globe, not least Nigella Lawson. Made from a mixture of full-fat cream cheese, eggs, sour cream, sugar and cornflour, it's baked at a high temperature until set but soft in the middle. The cheesecake rises, but then sinks as it cools, a process that gives it such a distinct dip and cracked exterior, while the 'burnt' surface takes on a caramel flavour.

WHERE TO FIND IT: La Viña in Donostia, San Sebastián, where it was invented by chef-patron Santiago Rivera in the early 1990s.

Japanese cheesecake

Also known as 'cotton cheesecake' or 'souffle cheesecake', Japan's version is famous for its ethereal, fluffy texture. Its origins lie in a trip to Germany in the 1960s, taken by Japanese chef Tomotaro Kuzuno. Having become a fan of cheesecake while in Berlin, he started working on his own version, which was less sweet and far lighter. Its distinctive airy texture is created by separating the eggs and whipping the egg whites to incorporate air into the mixture. It's then baked in a bain-marie, which helps retain the delicate texture.

WHERE TO FIND IT: In 1990, Tetsushi Mizokami opened his first specialist cheesecake shop in Hakata-Fu, Fukuoka. This grew into the Uncle Tetsu chain. uncletetsu.com

Kasekuchen

Quark, a fresh cheese made from cultured milk (buttermilk), is a much-loved ingredient in the German kitchen, where it's transformed into dips and spread on bread. It's also the key ingredient in this traditional cheesecake, its dense texture and tangy flavour adding a distinctive character when mixed with eggs, sugar and baked on a pastry base.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Elegant Princess Cheesecake, in the Mitte district of Berlin.

RESTAURANT B

IMAGES: ALAMY; JONATHAN LOVEKIN; STOCKFOOD; PATRICIA NIVEN

JUNIORS
JUNIORS

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Clockwise from top left: Junior's Restaurant, Brooklyn; valdeon cheesecake, Nopi; interior of Honey & Co, London; Basque burnt cheesecake

FOUR TO TRY

creative cheesecakes

VALDEON CHEESECAKE, NOPI

In his stylish London restaurant, ever-inventive chef Yotam Ottolenghi offers a memorable savoury cheesecake made from a Spanish blue cheese, served with beetroot and honey. Offering an appealing combination of soft-textured salty-sweetness, this has become a NOPI signature dish. £15.50. ottolenghi.co.uk/restaurants/nopi

BLOOD ORANGE CHEESECAKE, ÂRTISSERIE

At his chic patisserie in Tenterden in Kent, acclaimed pastry chef Chris Underwood has created an exquisite, intricate version of cheesecake. A fine white chocolate shell contains a light mousse-like mixture of cream cheese and yoghurt, while in the centre is a ball of intensely flavoured, marmaladey, blood orange compote. £5. artisserie.uk

FETA & HONEY CHEESECAKE, HONEY & CO

This characteristically clever reworking of a classic kunefe from husband-and-wife team Itamar Srulovich and Sarit Packer has acquired a cult following — with good reason. The crisp, butter-soaked kadaif pastry, together with the smooth rich, salty-sweet cheese topping, make it irresistible. £9.75. honeyandco.co.uk

YORKSHIRE CURD TART, BETTYS

This traditional version of cheesecake is a historic, regional delicacy. It's made from a mixture of curd cheese, eggs, butter and currants, flavoured with lemon zest and nutmeg, and baked in a pastry case. Bettys in Harrogate offers an exemplary version. £5. bettys.co.uk

SWEDEN'S RETRO ROLL

A local take on a traditional Hungarian dessert, Budapest roll is a nostalgic Swedish classic. Words: Brontë Aurell

There's a lot of nostalgia associated with pastry and cake baking in Sweden. And few dishes evoke it better than Budapestbakelse — or Budapest cake.

Day to day in Sweden, we make cinnamon buns and home bakes such as the chocolate kladdkaka. But for special occasions, only fancier cream cakes will do. Budapest cake is a type of Swiss roll, made from a sheet of baked hazelnut meringue, filled with whipped cream and, most often, fresh or canned mandarin segments. You'll find it at every local konditori (bakery/cafe).

It was invented in the 1950s by Ingvar Strid, a well-travelled Swedish pastry chef, who loved the Hungarian capital. After one of his many visits to the city, he decided to adapt a Hungarian dessert called the esterházy torta — a cake with walnut meringue sandwiched between layers of ganache.

However, Ingvar added more accessible Swedish ingredients, such as hazelnuts and tinned mandarin segments, which were very much in fashion in the 1950s, and then changed the shape of the cake. His creation became an instant hit. What's more, its appearance has barely changed since then. After all, why mess with something wonderful, even if it does look like something from a colourful 1970s cookbook?

When I included a version of Budapest cake in my cookbook, *Brontë at Home*, I messed around with the fillings to try to update it a little and make it more current. But, in truth, once you remove the mandarin segments, it loses its nostalgic value, not to mention that fresh note of the orange fruit. Nevertheless, you can substitute these segments with whatever berries or fruit you fancy.

Budapest roll

SERVES: 8-10 **TAKES: 1 HR 40 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

175g hazelnuts
6 medium egg whites
325g plus 2 tbsp caster sugar
30g cornflour
1 tsp white wine vinegar
50g dark chocolate

FOR THE FILLING

300ml double cream
1 tsp icing sugar
seeds of 1 vanilla pod (or 1 tsp vanilla extract)
300g fresh mandarins, peeled (or tinned)

METHOD

① Heat oven to 180C, 160C fan, gas 4. Grease a 25cm x 35cm swiss roll tin and line with baking paper.

② Place the hazelnuts in a dry pan set over a high heat. Toast for 2-3 mins, moving them around so they don't burn. Leave to cool. Once cool, set aside 25g for topping, then place the rest into a food processor and pulse until roughly ground.

③ Add the egg whites and a tiny pinch of salt to a stand mixer (or use a bowl and electric hand whisk) and whisk until you get soft peaks. Continue whisking as you add the sugar, bit by bit, until you get stiff peaks; this may take a few minutes. Add the cornflour and vinegar, whisk briefly, then fold in the ground hazelnuts.

④ Fit a plain nozzle to a piping bag. Fill it with your meringue mixture. Pipe into the prepared pan in an even layer. (If you don't have a piping bag, spoon the mixture into the pan and spread evenly.)

⑤ Bake for 25-30 mins, until firm, slightly cracked on top and lightly browned. Leave to cool in the pan for 10 mins.

⑥ Cut a piece of baking paper slightly larger than the pan and place on your worktop. Carefully turn the meringue out onto the paper, leaving the lining attached to the base, and let cool completely.

⑦ For the filling, add the cream, icing sugar and vanilla to a large bowl. Mix using an electric hand whisk, until stiff.

⑧ Chop the mandarin flesh into small pieces. With fresh mandarins, remove the pips and as much membrane as possible.

⑨ When the meringue is cool, peel the paper off the base (brush with water if necessary). Spread a layer of whipped cream over the base and scatter on the mandarin. Tightly roll the meringue lengthways, using the paper underneath to help you. Transfer to a serving plate, with the seam hidden at the bottom.

⑩ Melt the chocolate in a bowl set over a pan of boiling water. Drizzle it messily over the meringue. Roughly chop the reserved hazelnuts and sprinkle over to finish. Chill in the fridge until ready to serve.

IMAGE: PETER CASSIDY/RYLAND PETERS & SMALL

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Clockwise from top left: peaches and cream schaum torte; Guinness punch pie; watermelon jelly with jasmine, chocolate and pistachio; apple strudel

CUSTOMISED CLASSICS

Be it poached pears on a pavlova or rye bread in a trifle, desserts are always ripe for reinvention. Here's our selection of creative showstoppers from the most exciting cookbooks around. Words: Nicola Miller

Peaches and cream schaum torte by Shauna Sever

You'd be forgiven for mistaking the schaum torte for pavlova, but there are crucial differences. Brought to the US Midwest by immigrants from the German Confederation in the mid-19th century, it predates the pavlova, Sever tells us. In addition, no cornflour is used to create meringue layers, which tend to be less billowy than a pavlova's because they're baked in cake tins before being stacked with layers of whipped cream, ice cream and fruit. Whereas some devotees among the Wisconsin supper clubs, where the torte is particularly popular, insist on sliced strawberries, Severs has used peaches here instead. *From Midwest Made: Big Bold Baking from the Heartland (£25, Running Press)*

Watermelon jelly with jasmine, chocolate and pistachio by Ben Tish

Tish's trifle is a wonderful hybrid of the Middle Eastern mahalabia, a wobbly pudding made from milk cooked with cornflour and jelly, set with gelatine or agar-agar. Taking its inspiration from Sicilian baroque, where Spanish, Moorish and Italian influences meet, its method involves watermelon juice and cornstarch cooked over low heat before being moulded, set and decorated with jasmine flowers and pistachios. A handful of bitter chocolate chips adds depth and complexity to create a showstopper which, despite jelly's playful modern-day image, would have been regarded as a sophisticated dessert served to the wealthy and powerful. *From Sicilia (£26, Bloomsbury Publishing)*

Coffee and walnut pavlova by Graham Herterich

County Kildare-born Herderich retains fond memories of his Irish mother's pavlovas. His own version comes with coffee-poached pears atop layers of meringue sandwiched by coffee-flavoured mascarpone cream. This isn't traditional Irish baking in the historical sense, but it reflects Herterich's family tradition born from "a trip down the memory lane of my childhood, teens and early twenties, all the way through to the past few years, when I became more confident in my decisions regarding food, flavours, inspirations and textures". *From Bake (£22, Nine Bean Rows Books)*

Dulce de leche chocoflan by Esteban Castillo

The chocoflan is known as 'pastel imposible' in Mexico, due to the fact that its two distinct layers swap positions as they're baked. Traditionally, the base comprises rich and fudgy chocolate cake. A layer of flan — evaporated and condensed milk, cream cheese, eggs and vanilla — is added on top, before the cooking process pushes the denser flan mix to the bottom and the cake to the top. The chocoflan is then flipped out of the mould, returning the cake layer to the bottom, before being topped with cajeta or dulce de leche. Castillo uses a whole can of dulce de leche in his flan and adds cinnamon to the chocolate to produce an even more indulgent version. *From Chicano Eats (£31, HarperCollins)*

Latvian rye bread trifle with summer berries by Zuza Zak

When Zak was served rupjmaizes kārtojums, a Latvian rye bread dessert, in Riga, it reminded her of English trifle. Yet whereas trifle is associated with festive indulgence, her Latvian-inflected version has the feel of a summer recipe, despite its darkly dramatic layers. Gluts of soft fruit, cream from cows at pasture, leftover bread and hemp seeds (a traditional Latvian ingredient) make it more economical than you'd expect, but no less incredible for it. *From Amber & Rye: A Baltic Food Journey (£26, Murdoch Books)*

Guinness punch pie by Melissa Thompson

A dessert can be a showstopper for many reasons. It can be flamboyant and exuberant in appearance, made from decadent ingredients, or possessed of a dramatic and intricate origin story. This pie falls mainly into the latter category, although it's also beautiful in an understated way. Thompson tells of how British colonisers took stout to Jamaica and of the island's eventual import of Guinness's West Indian Porter. Here, to produce a pastry-based tart with a storied sense of place, she melds Guinness with condensed milk (popular in hot climates due to its long shelf-life), and nutmeg, cinnamon and vanilla, which grow freely in Jamaica. *From Motherland (£26, Bloomsbury Publishing)*

Apple strudel by Michelle Polzine

The simple grandeur of a well-made strudel is expressed through the quality of its ingredients and a respect for a tradition that stretches back through the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the Balkans, where the dessert's paper-thin pastry found its likely inspiration in filo. Recipes abound, but Polzine's is its purest expression. A pastry chef by trade, she resists the temptation to gild the lily: "I keep it simple when it comes to fruit in desserts, so in this strudel I let the apple star," she writes. "You'll notice that there isn't any cinnamon or other spice to meddle with its perfect fragrance." *From Baking at the 20th Century Cafe (£27.99, Artisan)*

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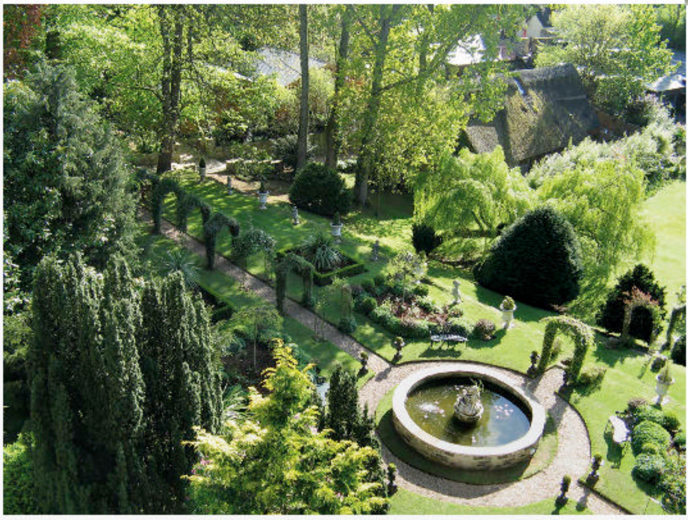

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'Spaghetti Bolognese', Privé de Dessert, Paris

Left: Milk Bar NYC

DINING OUT

just desserts

Who needs savoury courses when desserts are this good? Here's our pick of the world's best restaurants that specialise in the sweet stuff. Words: Lucas Oakeley

Cakes & Bubbles, London

As the former pastry chef of El Bulli, Albert Adrià has a reputation for dessert perfection. Choose from the likes of Basque burnt cheesecake, golden egg flan, chocolate yuzu castella cake, and a dish simply called 'The Cheese Cake'. Made with baron bigod, it looks like a washed rind cheese, but the 'skin' is actually made of hazelnuts and white chocolate. And there's a great list of sparkling wines to wash it all down. cakesandbubbles.co.uk

KOI Dessert Bar, Sydney

Former *MasterChef Australia* star Reynold Poernomo and his brothers Ronald and Arnold are the trio behind KOI Dessert Bar, a slick, minimalist spot in Sydney's Chippendale neighbourhood, where immaculate patisserie is served alongside stiff drinks. Try the multi-course set dessert menu, or go a la carte: the black sesame slice is a classic, but seasonal specials have included the likes of opera cake with black truffles. koidessertbar.com.au

Monèr, Mumbai

The creation of Freny Fernandes — a young chef who's worked at Michelin-starred restaurants around the world — Monèr's retro pink-and-turquoise aesthetic is almost as appealing as its desserts. Every dish is made with real attention to detail, particularly the petit gateaux, layers of airy dark chocolate mousse ramped up with salted caramel, passionfruit ganache and a layer of chocolate cake. instagram.com/moner_mumbai

CODA, Berlin

In Berlin's Neukölln neighbourhood, two-Michellin-starred CODA serves seasonal set menus entirely comprising desserts, all made without refined sugar or chemicals. To produce their perfect plates, chef René Frank and his team balance sweetness — achieved through techniques such as fermentation and reduction — with savoury notes. Expect dishes such as parsley root ice cream with lime vinaigrette and black garlic cream. coda-berlin.com

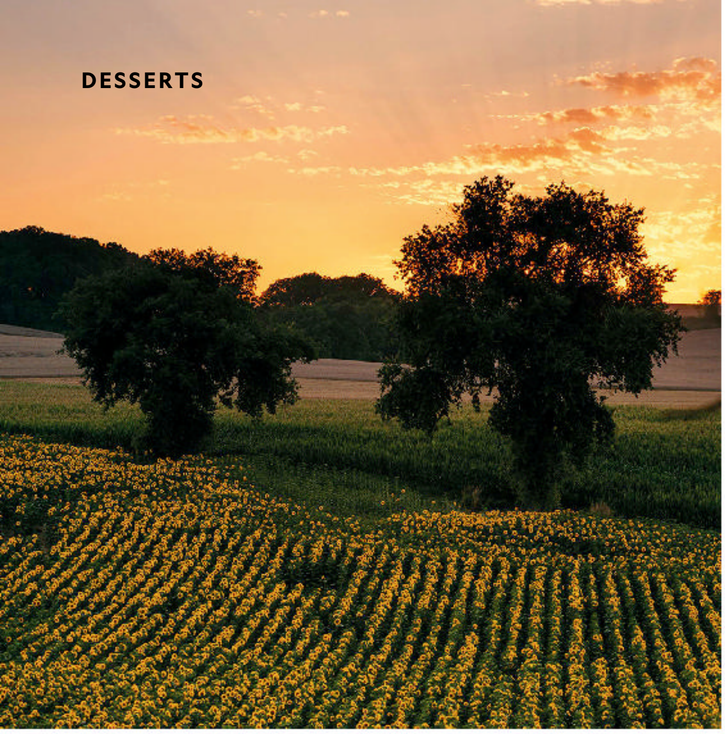
Milk Bar NYC, New York

The brainchild of James Beard Award-winning pastry chef Christina Tosi, Milk Bar's flagship store in Midtown is an ode to desserts, cakes and cookies. In a modern, minimalist space attached to the Ace Hotel, it serves crowd favourites including the Milk Bar pie — an oatmeal cookie crust with a buttery filling — and cereal-milk soft serve. Got an extra-sweet tooth? Wash it all down with a funnel cake milkshake. milkbarstore.com

Privé de Dessert, Paris

This is a different kind of dessert restaurant. Its three branches don't exclusively serve sweets, but the savoury courses are made to look like desserts, including a 'banana split' of salmon tataki with roasted plantain, dill cream and lemon caramel. Desserts, meanwhile, resemble savoury dishes: the steak-puree with sauce au poivre is, in fact, a molten chocolate cake with caramel crémeux and apple compote. privedededessert.com

IMAGES: ALAMY; FABRICE@VEIGAS.FR



CPH COOKING CLASS
COPENHAGEN DENMARK

Cherry pistachio tarts, Le Gargantua, southwest France

From top: scenery at La Gargantua; CPH Cooking Class

EXPERIENCES

class acts

Learn to make baked goods that look as good as they taste on an expert-led course. Words: Lucas Oakeley

Wee Buns Cookery School, County Tyrone

Located in the Northern Irish countryside, Wee Buns Cookery School gives attendees the chance to make the most of top-quality local produce while soaking up the area's natural beauty. The half-day Cake Making & Decorating with Buttercream course, which costs £80, is a practical experience where you'll learn how to make and decorate a classic chocolate cake and a lemon and raspberry sponge cake, using two different techniques. weebuns.com

Le Gargantua, southwest France

This part of France is renowned for its gastronomy, and the one-day patisserie course at Le Gargantua — based in an 1850s stone farmhouse, an hour's drive from Bordeaux — is a great introduction. You'll learn the techniques needed to make classic French pastries such as croissants, brioche and choux, as well as mastering creme patissiere, tarts and mousses. The €275 (£235) fee includes lunch and dinner, served with local wine. legargantua.com

CPH Cooking Class, Copenhagen

This Copenhagen cookery school offers classes for all levels, based around different themes, but the three-hour Danish pastry course is one of the most popular. For DKK625 (£72) you'll be taught how to create delicious sweet pastries from scratch. You'll be laminating, folding and shaping Viennese dough, as well as making various toppings and fillings to go on and in them. The best part? Eating your warm, fresh-from-the-oven bakes with a cup of hot coffee. copenhagencookingclass.com

Nanatang, Singapore

Specialising in cute and colourful cakes and desserts, Nanatang offers workshops on everything from Korean-style filled madeleines and buttercream floral cakes to the bakery's signature 'fatfat-carons'. Essentially less-dainty macarons, the fatfat-carons come filled with flavours such as vanilla cream cheese and lychee rose. Learn how to pipe, bake, fill and decorate them in a three-hour masterclass for S$178 (£110). nanatang.com

San Francisco Baking Institute, California

San Francisco is known for its sourdough, but the San Francisco Baking Institute is about much more than bread, with lessons in viennoiserie, pastry and cakes, too. Many of the courses are long and intensive — and often more suitable for professionals — but there are short options to suit ambitious home cooks. The £525 two-day pie-making class will teach you how to roll the perfect pastry casing and prepare a variety of crowd-pleasing fillings, such as apple, pumpkin, pecan and chocolate cream. sfbi.com

Bettys, Harrogate

For a crash course in showstopping desserts, sign up for the Sweet Pastry Delights course at Harrogate's Bettys Café Tea Rooms. Here you'll learn the pastry-making and confectionery skills needed to create a buoyant batch of chocolate-covered profiteroles and a citrussy lemon tart. During the £200 one-day course, you'll have hands-on time with expert tutors as you learn how to handle all-butter choux profiteroles, make a smooth vanilla creme patissiere filling, and blind-bake delicate pastry casings. bettys.co.uk

IMAGES: THOMAS PATTINSON; CPH COOKING CLASS

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SILVER OF THE SEA

On Germany's Baltic coast, from Wismar to Rostock, herring have inspired devotion for centuries. Today, they're still treasured, whether served fried with potatoes or pickled with raw onion

WORDS: CHRISTIE DIETZ. PHOTOGRAPHS: CELIA TOPPING

Sandwiches made with herring and other fish on sale at the fish market in Warnemünde

Left: Seagulls on the Fischland-Darss-Zingst peninsula

IT'S 9AM ON A CHILLY MARCH MORNING AND I'M STANDING IN THE SUNSHINE WATCHING TWO MEN SELLING FISH.

One is serving customers directly from his moored fishing boat, the other from the docks at the Old Harbour in the port city of Wismar. Between them are stacks of red and green crates, a heap of plastic bags into which they slip their freshly caught, shiny silver fish, and a blackboard scrawled with one word: herring.

Today is the first day of Wismar's annual two-week herring festival, and local fisherman Martin Saager is busy arranging wooden tables and benches next to a small white tent from which he and his colleagues will shortly be selling fried herring. Martin started his own business in 2003, after fishing for his father's company for almost a decade. Five years ago, he broadened his operations, opening a snack bar at the harbour, selling fish and chips and pickled herring, and buying fish from elsewhere to supplement his own catch. But today, his offering is simple: fried herring with sliced white bread. And bottles of beer. "Fish have got to swim," he grins.

Herring has been a staple food on Germany's Baltic coast for centuries and it remains a vital resource for small-scale fisheries across the region. On Wismar's cobbled streets, the legacy of the so-called 'silver of the sea' is clear to see. Three herring have a place on the city's coat of arms, and the wealth and power Wismar gained as a major trading centre of the Hanseatic League, in large part thanks to the oily fish, is evident in its numerous ornate, eye-catching buildings.

Wismar's historic centre, which has UNESCO World Heritage status, is home to a remarkable array of architecture, from half-timbered medieval buildings and colourfully painted gabled houses to elaborate red brick gothic cathedrals, a neoclassical town hall and a scattering of Swedish buildings that remain from that country's 150-year rule here. And while the former East German city didn't make it through the Second World War unscathed, many of its buildings have been carefully restored since the collapse of the GDR.

At the Restaurant & Hotel Wismar, I'm met by chef and owner Anne Werth, one of the herring festival's organisers. Her high-ceilinged, wood-panelled restaurant is adorned with maritime decor: framed maps and etchings, hand-painted boats and ornamental stacks of stones. Throughout the festival, her menu features dishes such as herring schnitzel with fried egg, beetroot and mash, or her signature fried herring — "I use rye flour rather than wheat to make the skin crispy," she explains — paired with stewed apple and onion, or with fried potatoes and a handful of crunchy, salty cubes of bacon.

I instead order a pair of herring that have been preserved in a sweet and sour brine of sugar and vinegar, bay leaves, mustard seeds and allspice before being browned in a pan. Served cold, garnished with rings of red onion and accompanied by a small bowl of fried potatoes, the two herring have bronze-coloured, wrinkly, soggy-looking skin. This is an important lesson in proverbial books and covers, however: their flesh is firm and meaty, sweet and sour, gloriously perfumed and deeply moreish. I happily polish them both off.

Later in the afternoon, travelling east from Wismar through gently rolling, grassy countryside dotted with wind turbines, red brick farmhouses and grazing horses, I arrive in the port town of Warnemünde, a district of the Hanseatic city of Rostock, whose centre is some six miles further inland. Warnemünde formed sometime around the turn of the 13th century as a small fishing village, but by the early 1800s it had gained status as a seaside resort for the families of wealthy Rostock merchants. Today, it's a popular tourist destination and a major stop for cruise liners.

LOCAL FAVOURITES

SEA BUCKTHORN
Thorny bushes of bright orange sea buckthorn berries thrive in the dunes along Germany's Baltic and North Sea coasts. Prized for their high vitamin C content, they're used in everything from jams to schnapps.

SOLYANKA
This sour soup of Russian origin became an easy-to-prepare classic in the GDR. The traditional East German version typically includes peppers, pickled vegetables and leftover meat and sausage or fish, flavoured with tomato paste and paprika and served with sour cream.

MECKLENBURGER RIPPENBRATEN
Popular across much of north Germany, this rib roast was originally a festive speciality of rural Mecklenburg. Pork belly is stuffed with baked fruit such as apples and plums, roasted and served with red cabbage and potatoes or dumplings.

ROTE GRÜTZE
This northern German and Scandinavian dessert is a sweet mix of (mostly red) berries and cherries. Thickened with starch or even the groats, or grütze, from which the dish gets its name, it's best enjoyed with vanilla sauce.

A ceramic container for marinated herring at Restaurant & Hotel Wismar

From top: A couple eat herring sandwiches on the harbour at Warnemünde; a fisherman fishing for herring in Warnemünde

Traditional rollmops — pickled herring fillets

From top left: A shopping street in Wismar; a fisherman selling herring at the Old Harbour in Wismar

Here I meet local guide Klaus Lass, a tall man with a white handlebar moustache, who walks with me in the direction of the sea along the Alter Strom, a canal lined on one side with lovingly renovated fishermen's cottages, some of which are now shops and restaurants. Fishing cutters and sailing vessels bob about on the water, and there's a queue of people in winter coats waiting to buy fish sandwiches from an old East German boat. "Those are used for selling to tourists," Klaus tells me. He then points to a strip of mobile stands on the east side of the canal. "Over there is for locals."

We cross the canal on a 120-year-old swing bridge and make our way down the line of stands that make up Warnemünde's fish market. Chalkboards list potato soup and sausages in bread rolls, while huge old metal smokers display fat, orange chunks of fish. Domed glass counters are crammed with rows of pickled herring sandwiches in shell-shaped buns, stacks of plastic tubs of rollmops and matjes (fillets of young herring in salt brine), and piles of little fried sprats. Six days a week, these small-scale fisheries also clean and sell their freshly caught fish from small shacks between the mobile stands. However, due to fishing quotas, they now have to buy in the ready-to-eat stuff.

These quotas, in place all across Germany's Baltic coast, aim to address the fact that herring stocks have been producing fewer and fewer offspring — a result of both historic overfishing and the warming of the Baltic Sea. Earlier, when I'd spoken to Dr Christopher Zimmermann, head of Rostock's Thünen Institute for Baltic Sea Fisheries, he explained it's likely to take "six to seven years to get [stocks] back to a good amount", adding it was "unlikely previous levels will ever be reached again". The effects of this have been felt throughout the region. "There are 15 fishermen remaining in Warnemünde," says Klaus. "There were 80 during the GDR."

A taste of the Teepott

We stroll back over the canal and down an alley, turning into Alexandrinenstrasse — one of Warnemünde's old streets, running parallel to the Alter Strom. It's narrow, cobbled and very pretty, lined with trees and more impeccably kept cottages. We walk to the end of the street, arriving at a small square next to a sand-coloured 19th-century lighthouse that marks the start of Warnemünde's seafront promenade. Klaus tells me how, as a child growing up here in the GDR, he would be sent off to the beach in the mornings with his friends. "At lunchtime, we'd run home, shouting, 'Mummy, I'm hungry.' She'd make fried potatoes with herring, and then we'd all go back to the beach."

With its fine, pale golden sand and grassy dunes stretching into the distance, Warnemünde's Blue Flag beach is the widest on Germany's Baltic coast. At one end, the promenade tapers off into a sandy path that disappears into the coastal forest of the

Bismarck Herring

This German speciality is delicious served in a white crusty roll with lettuce, sliced onion and gherkins.

SERVES: 4-5 **TAKES: 15 MINS PLUS 4 DAYS RESTING/ MARINATING**

INGREDIENTS

- 10 fresh herring fillets
- 500ml white wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp granulated sugar
- 2 bay leaves
- 5 allspice berries
- 3 juniper berries
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- ½ tsp black peppercorns
- 2 medium onions, peeled and sliced into rings

METHOD

① Place the fillets in a glass bowl and sprinkle with 1-2 tsp salt. Cover tightly with cling film, place in the fridge and leave to rest for 2 days.

② Once rested, rinse the fillets in cold water and put into a clean glass bowl.

③ Add the vinegar to a medium size saucepan along with 500ml water, the sugar, bay leaves, spices and 1 tbsp salt. Place over a high heat, bring to a boil then immediately remove from the heat. Leave to cool completely.

④ Add the sliced onion to the herring. Pour the vinegar mixture over the herring, making sure the fish is submerged. Cover tightly with cling film, put it in the fridge and leave to marinate for 2 days. Store in the fridge and eat within a week.

Taken from: The German Cookbook by Alfons Schuhbeck (£39.95, Phaidon)

Labskaus, served at Teepott restaurant in Warnemünde

Stoltera Nature Reserve. From where I stand at the mouth of the Unterwarnow estuary and the end of the Alter Strom, a pier stretches out into the deep blue water towards a green and white lighthouse, beyond which a large Danish ferry chugs slowly towards the port. Behind me, partially hidden by a sand dune, is the rather incongruous curved concrete shell roof of the Teepott Building, which has housed a beach restaurant since the late 1960s and is a striking example of the modernist architecture of the former GDR.

Inside, Teepott's cream walls are decorated with black and white photographs of Warnemünde — images of beach scenes involving fishing boats and Germany's famous striped, hooded wicker beach chairs, which were invented here in 1882. I've come to try the labskaus, a salt-cured beef and potato dish that originated as sailors' fare and incorporated whatever other rations were available on board. Served warm, Teepott's version comes topped with a fried egg and garnished with slithers of pickled cucumber, three shiny rollmops and two pink pieces of smoked char. The labskaus itself vaguely resembles steak tartare and tastes a little like corned beef hash, but it has a pleasingly coarse, meaty texture and a peppery kick. I ask what's in it. "Matjes, sour gherkins, beetroot, salted beef brisket, potatoes, rosemary, chives, parsley and dill," I'm told. "And a whole lot of love."

My final stop is the peninsula of Fischland-Darss-Zingst, known for its pristine, powdery beaches and the ancient beech forests of the Western Pomerania Lagoon Area National Park. I stay in Ahrenshoop, one of the peninsula's six villages, located on a strip of land less than half a mile wide, between the Baltic Sea and the Saaler Bodden lagoon. A former fishing village and an artists' colony in the late 1800s, Ahrenshoop today is a small but popular holiday destination full of boutiques, gift shops, galleries and exceptionally charming, colourfully painted thatched houses.

I wake early on my last morning to watch the sun rise on Ahrenshoop's beautiful white beach, fringed with orderly bristles of newly planted dune grass. The air is bitterly cold, the sea is calm and the beach is bathed in a hazy pink light. Gulls perch on wooden breakwater posts and there's a sporadic quack from the ducks bobbing about near the shore. I realise that once there would have been fishermen in the water at this time, hauling in the nets they left overnight. I think of the past centuries of fishing and trading, the wealth and the success that herring brought communities all along the coast, and what's now in danger of being lost. A goose honks overhead, snapping me out of my thoughts, and I stand up and shake the sand off my coat. Then I turn and head back to my hotel, wondering if I can't fit in one last herring for breakfast before I go. ▯

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

Airlines that fly direct to Hamburg from the UK include EasyJet from Manchester, Edinburgh and London Gatwick, and British Airways and Eurowings from Heathrow. Hamburg can be reached by train from London, with two changes.
easyjet.com
ba.com
eurowings.com
thetrainline.com

WHERE TO STAY

The Dock Inn Hostel Warnemünde is a modern hostel with large communal areas, bike rental, a bouldering hall and a sauna. The rooftop shipping containers make for minimalist but comfortable doubles with views of the shipyard. Shipping container from €44 (£38).
dock-inn.de

HOW TO DO IT

Expedia offers two nights at the Townhouse Stadt Hamburg Wismar from £250pp, including EasyJet flights from London Gatwick.
expedia.co.uk

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DECONSTRUCT

MASSAMAN CURRY

Rich and mild, this complex dish contains spices not often seen in Thai cuisine, reflecting culinary influences from across Asia. And the theories about its precise origins are equally diverse

WORDS: REBECCA SEAL. PHOTOGRAPHS: STEVEN JOYCE
FOOD STYLIST: ELLIE MULLIGAN

Massaman isn't like other Thai curries — at least, not the well-known ones. Rather than being chilli-hot — like a green or red curry — it's positively mellow, featuring ingredients that might seem more at home in a Middle Eastern spice market or an Indian kitchen than a Thai dish. Mace, nutmeg, cloves, cassia, bay leaves and nuts all play a part in this rich, aromatic, slow-braised dish's distinctive character.

Massaman curry, as we now know it, probably started life in the 17th century, but its origins stretch much further back. Thailand, which was known as Siam until 1939, was never colonised by Europeans, but has been an important part of trade routes connecting East and West for thousands of years. Recent archaeological finds in Thailand provide evidence of this; they include coins, gems and jewellery that were originally produced in the Mediterranean, modern-day Pakistan and China before finding their way here. But it wasn't just trinkets that were exchanged — flavours were, too, although exactly when, how and by whom is a matter of debate.

"A version of massaman curry was first introduced to Thailand by the spice traders coming over from India and as far away as Persia," says Saiphin Moore, chef and co-founder of restaurant chain Rosa's Thai. "They'd stop over in the ports of southern Thailand on their way to China through the Malacca Straits. Since the curry landed in a region with a large Muslim community, the recipe has always called for beef or chicken. It uses spices you don't typically see in Thai cuisine, but we make it Thai by mixing them with super-traditional ingredients like lemongrass, galangal and kaffir lime peel. It's a history of Thai food in one bowl."

Malaysian cooks may have had a part to play too. As chef Bongkoch 'Bee' Satongun, founder of Paste Bangkok, a Michelin-starred restaurant in the Thai capital, points out: "At the time, the relationship between the south of Thailand and northern Malaysia was strong — both Thai and Muslim cultural influences were shared on both sides of the border."

Still others note that migrants from Persia, modern-day India and Pakistan also settled further north in the plains around what would become Bangkok, including cookbook author Leela Punyaratabandhu's Hindu Brahmin ancestors. Her version of the recipe cleaves to the idea that massaman is more of a Bangkokian dish than a southern or Muslim creation. The word 'massaman' is probably a corruption of 'Mosulman', an archaic word meaning Muslim — so whether it was invented within, or brought to, the Muslim communities who grew to love it, it seems likely it was named after them.

Australian chef, restaurateur and cookery writer David Thompson — a long-term resident of Thailand who's studied its food for decades — has an even more precise theory about massaman. In his influential book *Thai Food*, he writes: 'This style of curry is believed to have arrived in Siam with the first Persian envoy [Sheikh Ahmad] to the Court of Ayuthia in the 16th century.'

The earliest-known Thai written recipe for massaman curry dates to 1889, so if Thompson's theory is correct, massaman would have been nearly 300 years old at this point. The recipe was written by Lady Plean Passakornrawong, a courtier's wife who went on to write one of the earliest Thai cookbooks, *Maae Khruaa Huaa Bpaa*, published in 1908. Another source of early Thai recipes are funeral books — booklets given out at funeral ceremonies that memorialise the deceased and often include a favourite recipe. Many chefs have collections of these (Thompson has over 500, some dating back to the 1800s); those of Sheik Ahmad's descendants, the Bunnag family, are considered a vital part of Thai food history.

Although its origin story is a little unclear, there's more consensus on the how it should be cooked — slow — and eaten — ideally, the day after cooking, perhaps with crunchy pickles on the side. It's a home-style dish. "I see it as a weekend curry — a curry you make when you have time to babysit it," says Punyaratabandhu.

The type, and quantity, of aromatics used may vary, but they usually include shallots, dried chillies, garlic, lemongrass, coriander root, coriander seeds, cumin, cloves, nutmeg, mace, cassia (or cinnamon) and Thai cardamom, plus shrimp paste and sometimes galangal or ginger. Most recipes require these ingredients to be roasted or toasted before they're ground into a paste. This is then cooked in 'cracked' coconut cream (fresh, thick coconut cream that's been cooked in a sizzling hot pan until it's split and the water has evaporated, leaving behind the fat). The meat is usually seared separately, before being slowly braised in coconut milk, to which the aromatic paste is finally added. At the end, the curry is seasoned with palm sugar and tamarind water, plus — perhaps — a dash of fish sauce, giving it the classic Thai balance of sweet, salty and sour. (A common mistake outside Thailand is to use lime juice or even vinegar to achieve this.)

"My mom loved to cook massaman," says Bee Satongun. "She wouldn't put in potatoes but she would use pineapple instead." This is a common alternative, and at the end of braising the curry, some cooks season by adding tart-sweet pineapple juice instead of tamarind.

"There aren't a lot of versions," says Punyaratabandhu. "Massaman is a dish that doesn't usually depart from the normative version. Cooks don't usually mess with it, and diners don't usually expect them to, either."

Although vegetarian and vegan massaman curries do exist, this is a dish traditionally made with meat. Punyaratabandhu advises using "tough, collagen-rich cuts" of beef, or chicken thighs or leg quarters, rather than boneless, lean cuts. The meat should soften in the curry, with the sinew and fatty skin lending flavour and richness. "Massaman is not meant to be an easy dish you can put together in under 30 minutes," Punyaratabandhu explains.

Use waxy potatoes such as charlotte, anya, Jersey royal or new. The starchy kind will fall apart in the sauce, making it grainy, warns Leela Punyaratabandhu

Alternatively, duck, goat or even fish are sometimes used. And while it's served with rice or, in the south, even roti, it almost always contains a starchy vegetable. Usually potato, but English-Thai chef and cookbook author John Chantarasak says he's tried a version with daikon in Thailand. "And I see sweet potato in massaman more and more," he adds.

Dak Wichangoen is one of the few top chefs who's played with the classic recipe. Currently a judge on *MasterChef Denmark*, Wichangoen was previously head chef at Kiin Kiin in Copenhagen, the only Michelin-starred Thai restaurant outside Thailand, where she created a deconstructed massaman. "My grandmother sold food at a market, including massaman," she says. "Normally, you make it all in one big pot, but she never boiled the potatoes in the curry, and us children would help peel the steamed potatoes for it every morning, which gave me the idea to deconstruct it."

Wichangoen's creation combined traditional massaman flavours with Western techniques. "I made the curry with beef cheek, braised in a stock with all the seasonings that go into the curry. We used that broth to make the curry, blended and smooth and almost like a French sauce." The beef cheeks were thinly sliced and served with the noisettes of purple, white and sweet potatoes that had been confited in duck fat, plus both crispy and pickled onions, with the sauce added at the table.

This massaman may have been controversial, but it was lauded by diners. "Food is in evolution and doesn't stand still," says Chantarasak. "A lot of Thai food has mainly been known and cooked within Thailand, but as it's branched out to new territories, people are starting to use local ingredients to cook those dishes, which always means a dish will move forward and change."

TIMELINE

16th century
Chillies are introduced to Thai cooking from the Americas via Portuguese traders who first arrived in what was then Siam in 1511

Early 17th century
Sheik Ahmed arrives in Siam as the first Persian envoy to the Court of Ayuthia. It's thought he may have brought some of the ingredients for massaman with him

1656–88
Persian Shiite Muslims are allowed to live within the walls of Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam, where they exchange culinary ideas with the city's elites

Late 19th century
Prince Itsarasunthon, later King Rama II, writes a poem, Khrueng Khao Wan, to Princess Bunrot praising the fragrance and flavour of her massaman

1889
Lady Plean Passakornrawong writes her chicken massaman curry recipe, made with bitter oranges rather than tamarind or pineapple

2011
Massaman curry comes top of CNN Travel's list of the World's Best Foods.

2021
Australian prime minister Scott Morrison is accused of making a bad massaman when a photo he shares shows a parsley garnish and crumbled potatoes

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HOTEL & RESORT

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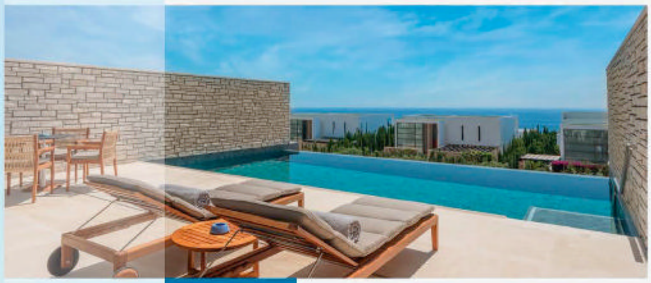

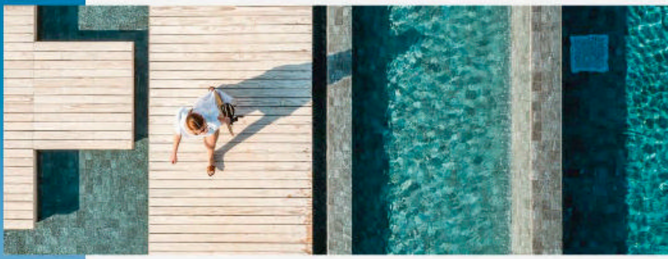

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John Chantarasak's beef shortrib massaman

"Most traditional Thai massaman recipes are time-consuming and complex, compared with simpler versions we encounter in Britain," says chef and cookbook author John Chantarasak. "Don't let that put you off, as the rewards are great." White cardamom pods are usually sold in Asian supermarkets, but if you can't find them, they can be omitted.

SERVES: 8 **TAKES: 3 HRS**

INGREDIENTS

- 1kg beef short rib, cut into 10cm pieces (ask your butcher to do this)
- 5 tbsp fish sauce
- 1L coconut milk
- 8cm piece of cassia bark
- 2 star anise
- 4 white cardamom pods
- dried peel of 1 mandarin (dehydrated for 4-5 hrs in a 55C oven)
- 2 bay leaves
- 6–8 medium Jersey Royal potatoes, peeled
- 200ml coconut cream, plus an extra splash to finish
- 2 tbsp palm sugar
- 3 tbsp jumbo golden sultanas
- 1 tbsp tamarind pulp soaked in 1 tbsp warm water
- 2 tbsp crispy fried shallots

FOR THE CURRY PASTE

- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- 2 cloves
- 1 mace sheath
- ½ tsp grated nutmeg
- ½ tsp white peppercorns
- 3 lemon grass stalks, root and outer husks removed, thinly sliced
- 8 large cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
- 1 large banana shallot, peeled and chopped
- 2 tbsp chopped galangal
- 1 tbsp chopped ginger root
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander root or stem
- 10 dried long red chillies, deseeded and soaked in cold water for 15 mins
- ½ tbsp shrimp paste

(continued on the next page)

(continued)

METHOD

① Heat oven to 160C, 140C fan, gas 3. Roll the beef pieces in 3 tbsp of the fish sauce. Set a hot dry frying pan over a high heat, then add the beef for 5 mins, turning until seared all over. There should be enough fat in the meat to stop it sticking. Set aside and reserve the rendered fat.

② Add the cassia bark, star anise and cardamom pods to a wok and place over a medium heat. Dry-toast for 2 mins until deepened in colour and aromatic.

③ Transfer the spices to a large saucepan along with the coconut milk, dried mandarin peel and bay leaves. Bring to the boil, then immediately take off the heat.

④ Add the beef to a casserole dish with a tight-fitting lid, then add the coconut milk and whole spices. Cover with a lid, then braise in the oven for 2 hrs, or until the beef is falling from the bone without completely collapsing.

⑤ Meanwhile, make the curry paste. Set your wok over a medium heat; add the coriander seeds, cumin, cloves, mace, nutmeg and peppercorns, and dry-toast for 2 mins. Transfer to a spice grinder and blitz to a fine powder, then pass through a fine sieve to remove any larger chunks. Set aside.

⑥ Return the wok to a medium heat, and add the lemon grass, garlic, shallot, galangal, ginger and coriander root or stem. Dry-toast for 10 mins then use a pestle and mortar to grind until smooth. Add the chillies, shrimp paste, your spice powder and 1 tsp salt, then pound again until combined.

⑦ When the beef is ready, strain the braising liquid through a fine sieve; you should have about 500ml. Leave the beef to cool slightly before slicing into 2½cm pieces.

⑧ Add the potatoes to a large saucepan and cover with lightly salted water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 8–10 mins, until cooked through. Strain and set aside.

⑨ Combine the coconut cream with the reserved rendered fat in another large saucepan. Warm over a medium heat for 3 mins, or until the cream separates and the thinner liquid evaporates. Add 4 tbsp of the curry paste and cook for another 5 mins, until incorporated.

⑩ Fry for 8 mins, until the mixture darkens and becomes fragrant. Add the sugar, the remaining 2 tbsp fish sauce and salt to taste, and let these cook into the paste. Add the reserved braising liquid, bring to a simmer and cook for 8–10 mins, until the sauce develops an oily sheen and has a pouring consistency.

⑪ Add the sliced beef to the sauce, along with the sultanas and cooked potatoes, and warm for 1 min. Remove from the heat and leave to stand for 5 mins so the flavours can develop. Gradually mix through the tamarind water, then transfer to a serving dish and top with a splash of coconut cream and the fried shallots.

Taken from Kin Thai, by John Chantarasak (£22, Hardie Grant)

Photo: Marius Rua

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WHERE TO EAT

Some of the best places to sample massaman curry in Thailand and the UK

NAHM, BANGKOK
One of the best-known Thai restaurants in the world, Nahm was founded by chef David Thompson but is now helmed by Pim Techamuanvivit, who's ensured that the restaurant has kept its Michelin star for the past five years. She serves two versions of massaman: one with beef, grilled potatoes and burnt shallots, and a vegetarian version featuring root vegetables and seasonal fruit. comohotels.com/metropolitanbangkok

KRUA AROY-AROY, BANGKOK
This simple shophouse and family-run restaurant is home to some of Bangkok's most popular massaman curries, made with either chicken or the less common addition of pork. You'll also find steaming vats of dishes from all over Thailand, including Burmese-influenced specialities from the north. It's justifiably popular with local office workers as well as tourists, with long lunchtime queues at the counter. facebook.com/kruaaroyaroy

MINBURI MARKET, BANGKOK
The massaman at this small market on the outskirts of Bangkok is a favourite of chef Saiphin Moore, co-founder of Rosa's Thai. Though primarily a produce market, "heaps of fresh curries are sold daily here for you to take home or to have with rice right at the market," she says. Moore's preferred version is made with beef brisket. 18 Sihaburanukit Rd, Min Buri, Bangkok 10510

BLUE ELEPHANT PHUKET
One of four Blue Elephant restaurants founded and run by Nooror Somany Steppe (known as Chef Nooror) — the others are in Bangkok, Copenhagen and Malta — this branch is set within a beautiful early 20th-century mansion. Chef Nooror has been an ambassador for Thai food for over 40 years and her massaman paste recipe is almost as famous as she is. Based on her mother's version, the curry features fresh ginger and coconut juice. blueelephant.com

PLAZA KHAO GAENG, LONDON
Opened in Oxford Street's Arcade Food Hall this spring to rave reviews, Plaza Khao Gaeng is modelled on the canteens in Thai markets and shopping centres, where curries and rice are served from vast metal trays. Come here for the aromatic beef massaman (pictured), but be sure not to miss the turmeric chicken wings or the tamarind and mint kombucha. plazakhaogaeng.com

DISTRICT, MANCHESTER
District is loud, brash and very deliberately cool — there's a lot of stainless steel and purple lighting — and almost as much attention is paid to the playlist as the menu. The food is adventurous (the restaurant brands itself as 'new wave Thai') and smart, with a massaman made with wagyu beef and pickled Thai shallots. Other menu highlights include kohlrabi som tum and raw sea bass with nam jim dipping sauce and purple yam. districtmanchester.co.uk

TING THAI CARAVAN, EDINBURGH & GLASGOW
There are four Ting Thai Caravans — two in Edinburgh, two in Glasgow — all serving a combination of Thai favourites such as green, red and yellow curries, along with lesser-known dishes like deep-fried eggs or crispy pork skins, both served with chilli jam. The massaman curry comes several ways: with chicken, beef or vegetables, or for something slightly richer, confit duck leg. tingthai-caravan.com

LONG CHIM, LONDON
David Thompson is bringing his laid-back Australian-Thai restaurant, Long Chim — which currently has branches in Dubai and Singapore, as well as Australia — to London this winter. The first European outpost is in Horse and Dolphin Yard, a historic courtyard in Chinatown, and while details are currently thin on the ground, the hope is this branch will serve the massaman that features on the menu at Long Chim Perth — a delicately spiced curry with beef and sweet potatoes. instagram.com/longchim

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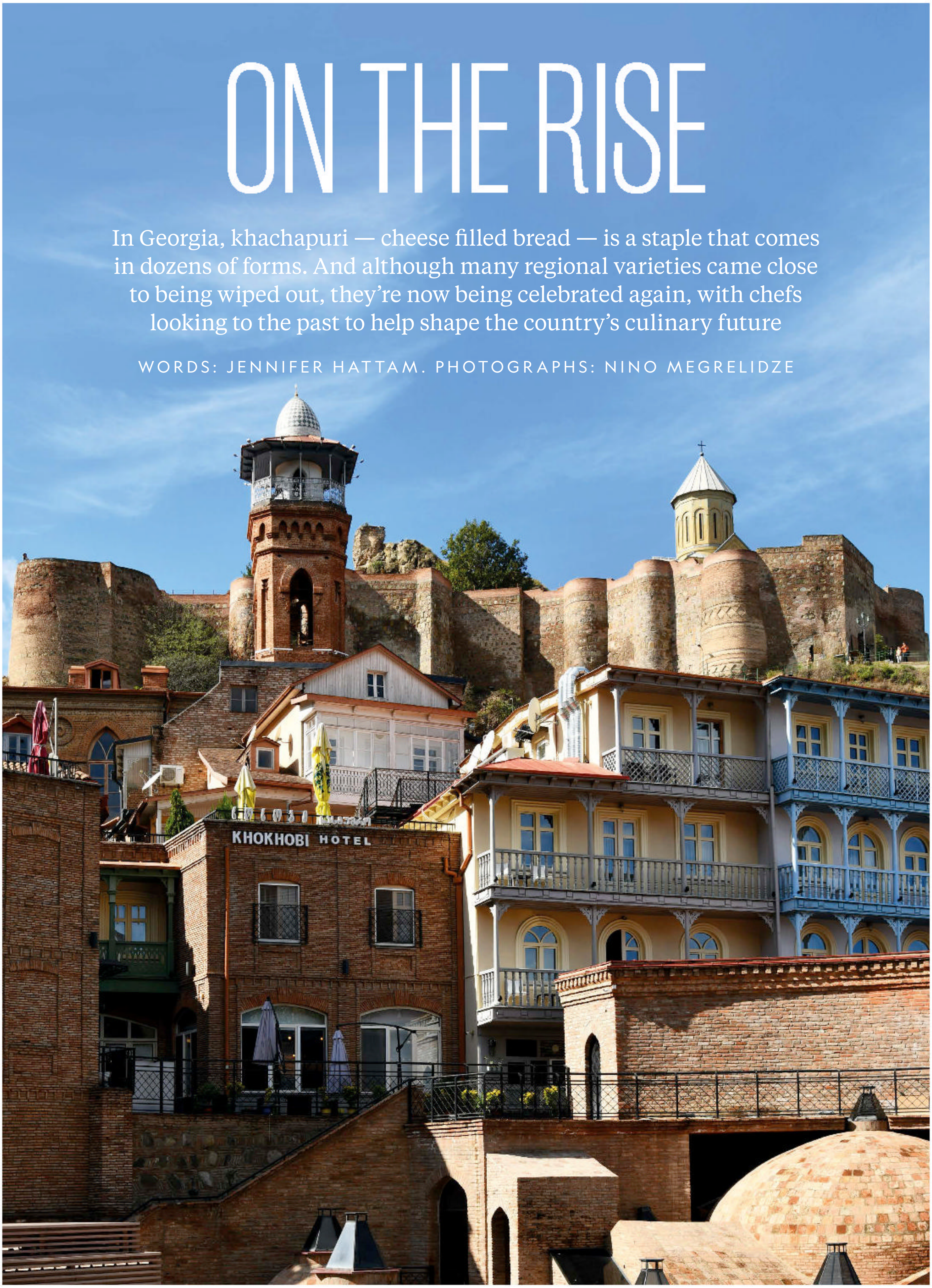
ON THE RISE

In Georgia, khachapuri — cheese filled bread — is a staple that comes in dozens of forms. And although many regional varieties came close to being wiped out, they're now being celebrated again, with chefs looking to the past to help shape the country's culinary future

WORDS: JENNIFER HATTAM. PHOTOGRAPHS: NINO MEGRELIDZE



"Everyone will tell you their granny made the best khachapuri in the world,"

Maka Shengelia says, breaking up the bright orange egg yolk with her fork and stirring it into the bed of soft white cheese beneath. She dabs butter onto the crunchy crust of the boat-shaped dough that cradles the gooey mixture, and we dig in.

In Georgia, khachapuri is enjoyed at every type of occasion and any time of day, whether for breakfast, as a quick snack or as part of a lavish dinner feast known as a supra. Maka, a culinary guide in Tbilisi, has brought me to Retro, one of the capital's many sakhachapures (khachapuri cafes), for a taste of the house speciality: Adjarian khachapuri, named after the Black Sea coastal region from which it — and Retro's owner — hails. This is a classic sakhachapure, with a simple decor of bare walls and wooden picnic tables, plus traditional Georgian fizzy drinks on tap. Maka orders chocolate flavour, a childhood favourite, while I choose an electric-green tarragon lemonade whose fizzy sweetness and liquorice notes cut through the rich, salty cheesiness of the khachapuri. We eat with our hands, tearing off chunks of the chewy bread to scoop up the filling with.

I've come to Tbilisi to learn more about khachapuri, and with each meal I have, it becomes clear I'd need much longer than a few days to try every version of this classic comfort food. The common refrain is that there are as many recipes for khachapuri as there are kitchens in Georgia, and almost 50 distinct varieties have been identified. Some are round, others square. They can be open or closed, flaky or soft, cooked on the stove or in an oven, stuffed with everything from meat to wild greens, mashed potatoes and caramelised onions. One thing, though, is non-negotiable.

"If it doesn't have cheese, it's not khachapuri," says Esma Kunchulia. A TV chef and founder of *Pirveli*, Georgia's first culinary magazine, Esma has invited me to her home on the outskirts of Tbilisi, where she hosts dinners and cookery classes that celebrate and spread the word about her country's cuisine. Today, the table is covered with a spread of Georgian classics. There's a bowl of satsivi (chicken in a creamy walnut sauce). A plate of nigvziani badrijani (thinly sliced and fried aubergine rolls stuffed with a garlicky walnut-and-herb paste). A salad of tomatoes, onions and cucumbers. Smoky, salty sulguni (a brined cheese) on a bed of ghomi (a cornmeal porridge). And, of course, there's khachapuri; two types, each from a different region: one Svanetian style — pillowy dough stuffed with a mix of soft cheese and green onions — and one flaky, crescent-shaped Gurian variety, filled with cheese and hard-boiled eggs.

Khachapuri's name, Esma tells me, comes from the Georgian words for cheese curds

Clockwise from top: Barbarestan; the restaurant's executive chef, Barbare Gogitidze, cooks with dambal khacho, a traditional Georgian cheese; churchkhela and dry fruits at Dezerter Bazaar

Previous pages from left: the historic Abanotubani district, known for its sulphur baths; Adjarian khachapuri at Gunda restaurant

Barbarestan
Barbare Jorjadze's Restaurant
Gault Millau
132

Chef
Barbare Gogitidze

Hotel
ABANOTUBANI

Sulphur baths in the historic Abanotubani district

Below from left: sous chef Mariam Kobakhidze makes khachapuri at Gunda restaurant; making Adjarian khachapuri at the Bazari Orbeliani cooking school

gunda
გუნდა

and bread ('khacho' and 'puri', respectively). Different varieties are associated with different regions of the country: Svanetian originates in Svaneti, in the north west, while Gurian comes from the Guria region, north of Adjara.

Georgian food, Esma adds, is "a mix of Asia and Europe — our style of cooking comes from both our guests and our enemies". In both categories, the list of culinary contributors is long. Georgia's history dates back to the ancient kingdom of Colchis — the home of the Golden Fleece in Greek mythology — with periods under Roman, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman and Russian occupation or rule.

This blend of influences is evident on the streets of Tbilisi, which spreads along the banks of the Mtkvari River, overlooked by a fourth-century fortress. As I explore the city, I discover the architecture on Rustaveli Avenue — the main thoroughfare — ranges from imposing Soviet-era buildings to baroque and neo-Moorish edifices, while the nearby old town is a place of alleyways and cobbled streets, overhung by intricately carved wooden balconies. There are several bathhouses in this area, too, with domed roofs and lavish,Persian tiles, while the nearby Bridge of Peace — a modern, glass-and-steel construction — was a controversial addition to the cityscape when it was erected a decade ago.

The story of khachapuri

I head a few miles north of the old town, across the river, to Tbilisi's Dezerter Bazaar, to explore the source of many restaurant larders. All the cornerstones of Georgian cuisine are laid out at this open-air market, where vendors hawk baskets heaped with walnuts and dried fenugreek, buckets of vividly coloured pickled vegetables and stacks of churchkhela (a candle-shaped sweet made from walnuts encased in grape must), alongside plastic bottles full of both homemade sauces and chacha (the fiery local grape spirit).

I walk past a line of men selling potatoes out of the back of vans and my nostrils fill with an intense, citrussy scent. Around the corner, I find tables laden with piles of coriander. The fragrant herb is such a key part of the nation's cuisine that the Georgian politician, author and academic Levan Berdzenishvili once dubbed his compatriots 'Homo corianderous'. It can be found in everything from lobio (a bean stew) to the vegetable pâté pkhali, while in dried seed form it's one of the bases for khmeli suneli, a traditional spice mix.

The bazaar may be well stocked, but the war in Ukraine has had an impact on both Georgia and khachapuri, restricting crucial supplies of wheat from Russia, among other things. The ISET Policy Institute at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University compiles the monthly Khachapuri index, which tracks inflation based on the cost of the ingredients of Imeretian khachapuri (the most common variety, from the region west of Tbilisi) — specifically flour, cheese, butter, milk, eggs and yeast. Right now the index is showing an upward trend.

Gunda's pan-fried Imeretian khachapuri

Georgian cheese can be swapped for 550g crumbled feta mixed with 250g mashed mozzarella.

SERVES: 4 **TAKES: 1 HR**

INGREDIENTS

400g strong white bread flour
50g wholewheat flour
350g sour cream
50g whole milk
5g caster sugar
600g Imeruli cheese, grated
200g sulguni cheese, grated
butter, to serve

METHOD

1. Add the flours, sour cream, milk and sugar to a stainless steel bowl and mix until combined. Turn out onto a floured work surface and knead for about 4 mins, or until the dough starts to stick. Add 10g salt and continue kneading for another 7 mins.
2. Divide the dough into 4 portions (200g each), wrap with cling film and chill in the fridge for 30 mins.
3. In another bowl, combine the cheeses and divide into 4 portions (200g each). Set aside.
4. Once the dough has chilled, take a dough ball and roll out to a circle 30cm in diameter. Place a cheese ball in the centre, then gather the dough in accordion folds over the cheese and pinch to seal. Now roll it out again to the same size. Repeat with the remaining dough.
5. Place a 32cm frying pan over a medium-high heat. When the pan is moderately hot, cook the khachapuri for 3 mins per side, until browned. Repeat for the remaining khachapuri.
6. Serve warm with butter.

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Al fresco dining at Leila, in Old Tbilisi

But khachapuri is resilient and adaptable, a constant through often-troubled times. People I speak to in Tbilisi recall how, during the period of scarcity following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, their mothers would make the dish using oil instead of butter and just a smattering of cheese. Others who didn't have money to buy cheese "were mixing chopped pasta with salt and stuffing that inside khachapuri", according to Ia Katsia, an economist at the ISET Policy Institute. Meanwhile, migration from rural to urban areas gave rise to the now-common 'city-style' khachapuri, made with yoghurt and bicarbonate of soda instead of yeast, which takes longer to rise.

"Every khachapuri in every region has its own story," says Dalila Tsatava, president of the Georgian Gastronomy Association, when we meet at Leila, a city centre cafe with a mostly vegetarian menu. In the northern highlands of Racha, for example, the square, flaky local version of the bread is baked with a walnut in each corner as a talisman for a good walnut harvest.

During the 70-year Soviet period, Dalila says, state-run restaurants all served a standard selection of 10 dishes, and while Imeretian khachapuri made the cut, many of the regional varieties and customs surrounding the eating of the dish — which has traditionally been served at festivals — risked being lost. "Whenever a dish is part of a ritual, you know it's authentic," Dalila says, as I nibble on spinach pkhali and pickled jonjoli — the buds of the Colchis bladdernut tree. "But a lot of this [history] isn't written down, so even Georgians themselves sometimes don't know what treasure they have in terms of gastronomy." That, she adds, is how you end up with misnomers like 'cheese boat' or 'Georgian pizza' — the latter a term she particularly bristles at, telling me, "khachapuri existed long before pizza!".

Old and new

While the full history of the dish remains murky, Dalila cites mentions by Greek writers in the fifth century BC of a khachapuri-like dish being made in the Colchis territory. The word 'khachapuri', however, didn't appear in writing until 1725.

Perhaps because of its long history, and how close many regional variations have come to being lost, khachapuri doesn't tend to be something many Georgians are willing to tinker with. But that's not to say there's no room for innovation within the country's gastronomy as a whole. A few blocks south of Dezerter Bazaar, Barbarestan appears, at first glance, to be a traditional restaurant: embroidered table runners, vintage-style chandeliers, flower-patterned china. But in recent years, the family-run spot has been putting a new spin on Georgian cuisine.

I sit down with general manager Andria Kurasbediani and he explains how, after years of serving standard Georgian dishes,

IMAGE: GETTY

GEORGIAN FAVOURITES

Pkhali

Creamy, pâté-like pkhali (above) can be made from nearly any vegetable (spinach or aubergine are popular), pureed with walnuts, vinegar, garlic, coriander and spices. A mixed assortment of pkhali are often served in a gobi, a large bowl meant for sharing, the name of which is at the root of 'megobari', the Georgian word for 'friend'.

Khinkali

These fist-sized soup dumplings are probably the most recognisable Georgian food abroad after khachapuri. Typically filled with a mix of beef and pork, they can also be made with mushrooms, potatoes or cheese. Eat them by holding the twisted top (traditionally left on the plate once the khinkali has been eaten as evidence of a hearty appetite).

Chicken satsivi

Ground walnuts form the base of this chicken dish's sauce, which is also flavoured with onions, garlic, vinegar, coriander, fenugreek, red pepper, cinnamon and cloves. A dish for New Year's Eve feasts, it's served either cold or warm.

Lobio

This bean stew, spiced with coriander, fenugreek, garlic and onions, is baked and served in individual clay pots. 'Lobio' means 'bean', so any bean will do, but red or kidney beans are most commonly used.

his family reimagined and renamed their restaurant in 2016, taking inspiration from the first-ever Georgian cookbook, *The Complete Cuisine*. In the 19th century, Duchess Barbare Jordjadze compiled the historic 800-recipe volume by travelling around the country, and Barbarestan's menu refelcts this, featuring twists on many regional specialities. Racha-style lobio (traditionally, a kidney bean stew with smoked ham) becomes an explosion of flavour inside bite-size, fried balls of dough, the creamy bean filling seasoned with fenugreek, garlic and coriander. The Meskhetian noodle-and-yoghurt soup tutmaji, meanwhile, is prepared with homemade pasta stacked in a shape resembling the southwestern region's traditional nested domes.

Beyond Barbarestan, many more Georgian chefs and restaurateurs are turning to traditional recipes, techniques and produce for inspiration. At Gunda, a bright, modern Tbilisi sakhachapure, owners Levan Qoqiashvili and Lali Papashvili seek out regional cheeses for their khachapuri. These include the soft, strongly flavoured narchvi, which is traditionally aged for up to a year in wooden boxes in the villages of Svaneti.

In Gunda's open kitchen, Levan slips a piece of paper under the dough that a chef is rolling out to make puff pastry-style Meskhetian khachapuri. He tells me it's a trick he learned from an old woman in a village in the region. "The dough isn't thin enough until you can read the writing on the paper through it," he says. This one is just the right thickness, so the chef folds it in thirds, adds more butter ("never too much for this dough," says Levan) before folding it again in the opposite direction to make a square, cheese-filled parcel that's ready to bake in the wood-fired oven. Unlike with pizza, a closed oven is needed to keep the steam inside while cooking, Levan explains. He and Lali were so committed to doing things right, they even rebuilt the restaurant's outer wall to make room for a specially made, village-style oven.

Before opening Gunda in 2022, Levan and Lali worked with a team of researchers who combed all corners of Georgia to uncover as much as they could about khachapuri and its key ingredients. They documented 47 regional varieties, collectively using more than 80 types of traditional cheese and five endemic families of wheat. Most of these native grains were nearly lost under Soviet central agricultural planning, and the pair are doing their bit to bring them back — and in doing so, helping to reduce the country's dependence on Russian wheat. They've partnered with a nonprofit organisation that distributes endemic seeds to Georgian farmers; Gunda buys the flour they produce for use in the restaurant kitchen.

As we tuck into the flaky, hot-from-the-oven Meskhetian khachapuri, stuffed with buttery, stringy cheese, while sipping glasses of crisp Chinuri white wine, Levan tells me he and Lali are lobbying to have khachapuri recognised by UNESCO as part of the country's intangible cultural heritage.

"Georgia is such a small country, most people don't even know where it is. We want to preserve our cultural uniqueness and identity while saying something new," he says. "Khachapuri is much more than a food in Georgia — it's a symbol." ◻

Above: Oven-baked Imeretian khachapuri at Gunda

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
Airlines offering indirect flights from the UK to Tbilisi include Turkish Airlines from Gatwick, Birmingham and Edinburgh; Pegasus Airlines from Stansted; and Lufthansa from Manchester. turkishairlines.com flypgs.com lufthansa.com

WHERE TO STAY
Stamba Hotel, a luxuriously renovated former printing house, has doubles from 520 GEL (£169), including breakfast. Sister property Fabrika, a hip hostel, has private doubles from 170 GEL (£55), room only. roomshotels.com/stamba-hotel hostelfabrika.com

HOW TO DO IT
Regent Holidays offers an 11-day culinary tour of Georgia from £2,425 per person. Includes flights, accommodation, meals, local transport and guide. regent-holidays.co.uk

MORE INFO
georgia.travel

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SPIRIT OF THE KAMPONG

Among Singapore's skyscrapers, the Soh family's colourful, low-rise home has the feel of a traditional kampong (village), with fresh fish, fruit and veg prepared in a kitchen that's open to the elements

WORDS: JESSICA VINCENT. PHOTOGRAPHS: LAURYN ISHAK

A flash of red and grey feathers. The pungent smell of durian fruit. I crane my neck, raising myself up onto my tiptoes to see what everyone's crowding around. There's a blue bird cage mounted on a wheeled walking frame, sunflower seeds scattering at our feet. A woman, perhaps in her early seventies, is taking her pet parrot shopping.

I've come to Bedok — one of Singapore's oldest residential neighbourhoods, in the east of the city — to meet three generations of the Soh family, who have called this area home for almost eight decades. They've brought me to 58 Bedok Market, a low-rise, red-and-white-tiled building stocking everything from fish balls to toilet bleach. We're here to pick up seafood and spices for lunch at their home and cooking school, One Kind House.

The matriarch — a petite woman with pink lipstick, pencilled eyebrows and long, midnight-blue nails, who introduces herself simply as 'Mamma Soh' — soon tires of looking at the parrot and sets off towards the fish counters. Mamma Soh will be celebrating her 80th birthday next year, but I struggle to keep up as she makes a beeline past the piles of squid and cuttlefish the size of my forearm, towards the golden pomfrets: plump, silver fish with sunflower-yellow fins. "Their meat is fleshy and perfect for frying," says Mamma Soh, without breaking her step on the slick, tiled floor.

She greets the fishmonger at the pomfret counter like an old friend, asking how his mother is and laughing at his gut-splattered apron in a mix of English and Hokkien, a local language. Mamma Soh's son Calvin, daughter-in-law Arlette and granddaughter Ava have gathered around now as we garner the attention of neighbouring sellers. Mamma Soh is a diminutive woman — perhaps just over four feet tall — but she has real presence. "My mum was a primary school teacher in this neighbourhood," explains Calvin. "She taught most of the people here, so she's something of a local celebrity."

Two golden pomfrets are gutted and slung in a bag. Mamma Soh wanders off to another stand selling crabs the size of dinner plates and whitebait so fine and pale they look like beansprouts. She takes a closer look at a box of grey and pink prawns. She's cooking a prawn and passionfruit dish this afternoon — a staple of hers, which, she tells me, requires the freshest ingredients. Calvin is in charge of the clams with fermented soybeans, and he soon appears in order to inspect the shellfish on offer. Once she's had the nod from mother and son, the woman behind the counter piles a bucket-load of seafood into a bag.

Moving through the market at Mamma Soh's lightning-fast pace, the family say their hellos to sellers left and right. We pass a stand where yellowtail fish balls are made using the age-old method of mixing minced fish in wooden vats by hand. In the vegetable aisle, Mamma Soh buys lemongrass that comes up to her waist, along with her favourite blue ginger — a sharper, more citrussy version of the regular root. Then she pauses for the first time that morning. "That's everything," she announces. "We should stop for breakfast."

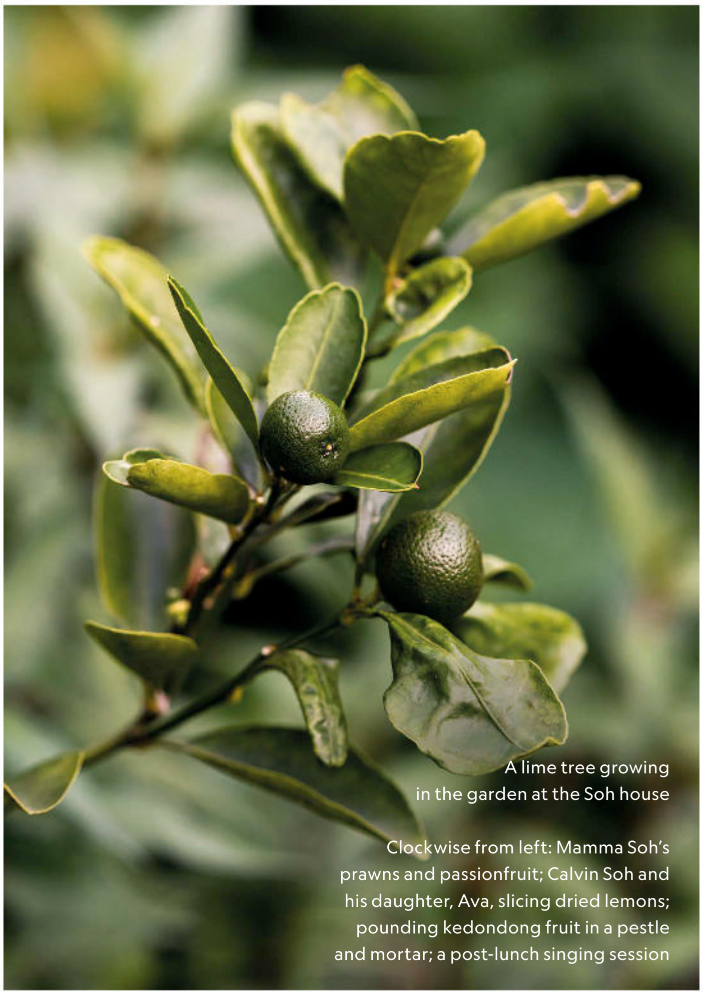
I follow the Sohs to an aisle flanked by dozens of hawker stands, positioned under blinding white strip lights. Bao buns, soft and white like clouds, are cooking in bamboo steamers stacked almost to the ceiling. Sticky barbecue pork bubbles in silver saucepans large enough to bathe in, while chillies and spring onions are thrown into the air with paper-thin noodles. We pick a stall and order some fried bread with sesame seeds, which we dip into cool soy milk.

"Breakfast is the largest meal of the day in Singapore," says Ava, Calvin's youngest teenager, tucking into noodles with chilli and black vinegar. She's not joking: next on the

Mamma Soh takes time out at One Kind House

From far left: 58 New Upper Changi Road Market; raw ingredients such as lemongrass, curry leaves, chives, lemons, galangal, ginger flower and shallots at One Kind House

Previous pages, from left: Cooking with the Soh family; stir-fried clams with curry leaves



A lime tree growing in the garden at the Soh house

Clockwise from left: Mamma Soh's prawns and passionfruit; Calvin Soh and his daughter, Ava, slicing dried lemons; pounding kedondong fruit in a pestle and mortar; a post-lunch singing session

menu are water chestnut dumplings, some sticky glutinous rice with barbecue pork, and a fish-ball soup with spring onion and coriander.

Living off the land and sea

Shopping bags and bellies full, we head over to the Sohs' home in west Bedok. A former fishing village, which once had direct access to the sea before the land was reclaimed for urbanisation, it's now one of Singapore's most densely populated neighbourhoods — trucks ply the multilane highways; four-storey shopping malls house designer shops and hawker centres; families zip-line over pruned parks and man-made reservoirs. All around, impossibly high apartment blocks reach for the sky like sunflowers of glass and metal.

Between the skyscrapers is a tin-roofed house painted in turquoise. There's a front garden with herbs in chest-high terracotta planters and a large red plaque that reads 'One Kind House' above the steel doors. I follow the family into their home, where Chinese lanterns, modern art and green plants hang from the exposed white brick walls, and there's an unobstructed view of the kitchen and back garden from the front door. The hallway is cool and light, thanks to a large air well in the ceiling.

"This is a typical Southeast Asian house," says Calvin, as we pass a vintage typewriter and a large ceramic frog. "The tin roof, the air well, the gardens — this is what a traditional kampong house would have looked like."

Before the skyscrapers, Singapore was made up of hundreds of kampongs. Meaning 'village' in Malay, kampongs are farming communities that live off the land and sea. But as Singapore transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy in the 1980s, practically all the kampongs, along with many of the fruit trees and plants that sustained life for centuries here, were demolished to make way for urban development. Many of those living in Singapore's rural villages in the 1980s were moved to apartment blocks subsidised by the government. Today, more than 80% of Singaporeans live in government housing, and only one kampong — Lorong Buangkok, in the north of Singapore — survives.

"When I lived here with my parents, there were chickens and ducks running around the streets," says Mamma Soh, whose mother and father bought the house in 1969. "Everyone would grow food and cook together."

As one of the few families in Singapore still living in a landed house, the Sohs wanted to keep the spirit of the kampongs alive. In 2012, Calvin quit his job in advertising and began to design a kampong home fit for the 21st century. The kitchen, dining area and adjoining garden were redesigned as a central living space, and an upstairs bedroom was turned into a research and development lab. Here, Ava launched her own jewellery line for a women's empowerment project. Dylan, her older brother, used the space to design One Kind Block, a hydroponic plant-growing system he hopes will help Singaporeans living in government housing to grow their own food. In 2016, the last piece of the puzzle — to teach others about kampong living — came together when the family hosted their first cooking class.

"The spirit of kampong is togetherness," says Calvin, who moved into the house with his mother in 1985 after a stint in government housing. "Modern society tells us to move old people to nursing homes, but I wanted to find a way to give my mother purpose and for my kids to learn about where they come from and who they want to be."

Mamma Soh takes me to the back garden to pick chillies and turmeric for lunch. The small patch of land is wilder than the front garden, with coriander, ginger, limes and papayas all fighting for space. "Everyone's garden looked like this once," says Mamma Soh, who, as the

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Mamma Soh's fried fish with kedondong pesto

eldest of 12 children, would help plant and harvest food from this garden as a child. "Now they all look like that," she says, pointing disapprovingly at the plastic turf next door.

Community cooking

Back in the house, it's all hands on deck, chopping garlic, ginger, chilli and shallots. The kitchen and dining room, open to the elements with no door separating it from the back garden, feels industrial in scale: there's a triple-height ceiling with a fan the size of a plane propellor, a marble and stainless-steel worktop big enough to sleep on, and a 10ft-long wooden table. "This is the heart of the house," says Calvin. "Food gives people the time and space to share their ideas and listen to others. That's the essence of a 21st-century kampong."

Dylan has arrived in time to make a pesto with kedondong leaves, also known as buah long long or ambarella, from the garden. While Arlette and Calvin catch up with their eldest child, I ask Mamma Soh who taught her to cook. "My mother," she says, rubbing turmeric, salt and pepper on the pomfret. "Well, she didn't teach me. I watched and learned — fast." She slaps the fish and laughs, before shallow-frying it over a high heat.

"My grandmother's food was simple, but tasty and filling — it was a style of cooking that could feed 14 people," Calvin adds, tying an apron around his waist.

"I find it hard to define Singaporean cuisine because it has so many influences and is always changing." He pauses. "Take what we're eating today. You could say it's Peranakan cuisine because it has Chinese, Malaysian and Indonesian influences. But we're always adding our own spin to the recipes. I guess that's what characterises Singaporean cooking — it's always changing."

"Why is my son wearing an apron? He's not cooking anything!" Mamma Soh interrupts from the hob, pouring glugs of oil into a charred wok. She adds prawns coated in cornflour, soy sauce and passionfruit juice and seeds, making the oil sizzle and the flames dance. I ask if there's an official name for the dish. "It's just prawns and passionfruit," says Mamma Soh, without taking her eyes off the wok. "My own recipe."

"You won't find these dishes in any restaurant in Singapore," says Arlette, motioning for me to sit at the table. "This food has been handed down through generations of kampong residents. It's community cooking."

Mamma Soh's fried fish with kedondong pesto

In this dish, fried fish is spiced with turmeric and pepper, and given a fruity twist with a pesto made with kedondong, also known as ambarella, a Southeast Asian fruit with a sweet and sour taste.

SERVES: 2 **TAKES: 30 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

700g whole golden pomfret (or other firm fish such as cod or snapper), descaled and gutted
1 tbsp ground turmeric
1 tbsp vegetable oil
2 whole red chillies, for garnishing

FOR THE KEDONDONG PESTO

25g young ambarella leaves and fruit, skin on (or green apple or unripe plum), chopped
1 garlic clove, peeled and finely chopped
½ onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 small red chilli, finely chopped
juice of 1 calamansi or lime
1 tsp granulated sugar

METHOD

1. Make three cuts on both sides of the fish. Rub the turmeric, 1 tsp salt and 1 tsp black pepper all over.
2. Add the oil to a large frying pan and place over a high heat. Fry the fish for 5 mins each side, until the skin is crispy and lightly browned, and the flesh is completely cooked through. Set aside.
3. Next make the pesto. Using a pestle and mortar, pound the ambarella leaves and fruit (or apple or plum), garlic, onion and chilli until smooth (or blitz in a food processor). Stir through the calamansi or lime juice and sugar, along with some salt to taste.
4. To serve, place the fried pomfret on a platter, spoon over the pesto and garnish with the whole fresh chillies.

A toast during lunch at One Kind House

A couple of minutes later and the prawns are ready. Calvin takes over the stove to cook clams with garlic, shallots, ginger and fermented soybeans. "Mum and I always cook separate dishes," he explains. "We've got our own way of doing things."

"Yes, my way is faster," says Mamma Soh, adding fresh red chillies and Dylan's pesto to the pomfret before frying the whitebait with salt and curry leaves. The kitchen fills with laughter and the hiss of sizzling oil. But suddenly, there's a more sinister sound. A low grumble, like the sound of a broken lawnmower, surges outside. A blanket of thick white smoke spreads across the garden and into the house. "They're fumigating the mosquitoes," says Dylan, rolling his eyes. "And in the process, killing all the bees and every other insect in Singapore," adds Calvin. "That's urbanisation for you — we're always fighting against nature."

The fumigation finally stops and we sit at the table, where the seafood dishes, along with blue pea rice and prawn crackers, are laid out on banana leaves. I help myself to the clams and crispy whitebait, getting an instant salty punch from the fermented soybean paste. The prawns are plump and tangy, the sweetness of the passionfruit and saltiness of the soy sauce complementing each other beautifully. The pomfret, crispy on the outside and flaky in the middle, is slightly bitter from the turmeric, and there are hints of pepper, while the fresh chillies and kedondong pesto add just enough heat and citrus notes.

We finish the meal with mango and pineapple dipped in a spicy green powder of kaffir lime, basil, mint, chilli and salt. Dylan, who's a John Lennon fan, plays Imagine on his guitar. Mamma Soh, who somehow still has the energy to dance, is spun in a circle by her granddaughter, Ava. Arlette and Calvin sing along, swaying slowly in their chairs. At that moment, something Calvin had said earlier comes to mind: "Food brings people together in a way that nothing else can. Around the dinner table, you arrive as strangers and leave as friends." ◘

HOW TO DO IT: Qantas and Singapore Airlines operate direct flights from Heathrow to Singapore. The Warehouse Hotel has doubles from S$345 (£198), room only. Cooking classes with the Soh family start at £96 per person and can be booked via Airbnb as part of the site's cooking collection. thewarehousehotel.com airbnb.co.uk/experiences/42827

Flavours of Singapore

LAKSA
A staple of Peranakan cuisine, variations of laksa can be found across Southeast Asia. A Singaporean version, known as laksa lemak, is made with chilli paste, coconut milk and fish stock. Then, cockles, fishcakes and prawns are added, followed by vermicelli rice noodles. Depending on which stall you're at, tofu, boiled egg and/or bean curd puffs may also be added.

NASI LEMAK
Meaning 'rich' or 'creamy' rice in Malay, nasi lemak is pandan leaf-infused rice, cooked in coconut milk. It's traditionally wrapped in a banana leaf and served with sambal, cucumber and toasted peanuts, but it's often served with fried fish and marinated chicken wings on the side, too. The Singaporean version, which originates in Malaysia, comes with whole fried ikan bilis (a local white anchovy), otah (grilled fish paste) and fried egg.

CHILLI CRAB
Chilli crab was born along the Kallang River in 1956, when a street food seller named Madam Cher Yam Tian decided to stir-fry the crustaceans with tomato sauce and chilli paste, rather than steaming them. The dish was a hit, and today it can be found across the city. Most chefs use local mud crabs, which are larger and meatier than other varieties, with sambal paste and egg yolk in the sauce.

GLUTINOUS RICE WITH BARBECUED PORK
Glutinous rice has a sticky, absorbent consistency that's perfect for rich sauces, and while it's served with a range of meat and vegetables in Singapore, barbecued pork is a firm favourite. Pork belly is coated in a sweet and salty marinade made with soy, hoisin sauce, honey and five spice. The meat is then roasted and charred over an open flame and served over the rice.

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CORNWALL

Out of season, after the summer crowds disperse, a different Cornwall emerges. At this time, local winter produce takes centre stage, visible on restaurant chalkboards across the county, but nowhere more so than in the west. Here relative geographic isolation has helped forge a strong community of producers, fishermen and restaurants, working together to provide visitors with some of the country's freshest and most exciting food

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID CHARBIT

St EIA

VERDANT
BREWING CO.

St Eia, in St Ives, is a small wine bar and bottle shop with a selection of rare and distinct wines. In winter, its simple menu draws on heartier ingredients such as charcuterie and mountain cheeses, which make the ideal snacks to accompany the daily-changing choice of wines by the glass. Over in Falmouth, restaurant Mine partners with small sustainable farms to ensure many local Cornish ingredients make it onto its weekly rotating menus, whether that's crab, trout, kale or wild mushrooms. Elsewhere, Verdant Brewing Co has been at the forefront of the UK's craft beer scene, and is synonymous with hazy, hop-forward IPAs. The firm's beer can be found in pubs across the county, as well as in its seafood bar in Falmouth. It has also recently opened a large taproom at its brewery in Penryn.

#SavingESTER

Chris 'Ranger' is one the last handful of oyster fishermen in the Fal Estuary, where he operates out of his 50-year-old wooden Truro River Oyster Boat, the *Alf Smythers*. Byelaws dating back to the 1870s prohibit mass mechanical dredging of the estuary, meaning local fishermen use sailing or rowing boats to gather their catch. Ranger has been a key part of efforts to respect the fragile stocks in the estuary and help the species' survival. It's hard work, involving sailing while simultaneously hauling up the hand-held dredges repeatedly over the day. The fishing takes place only during the winter months of October to March, to encourage spawning in the summer. The native oysters here are known for their mineral flavour, while Ranger says they also have "melon, lettuce and cucumber notes".

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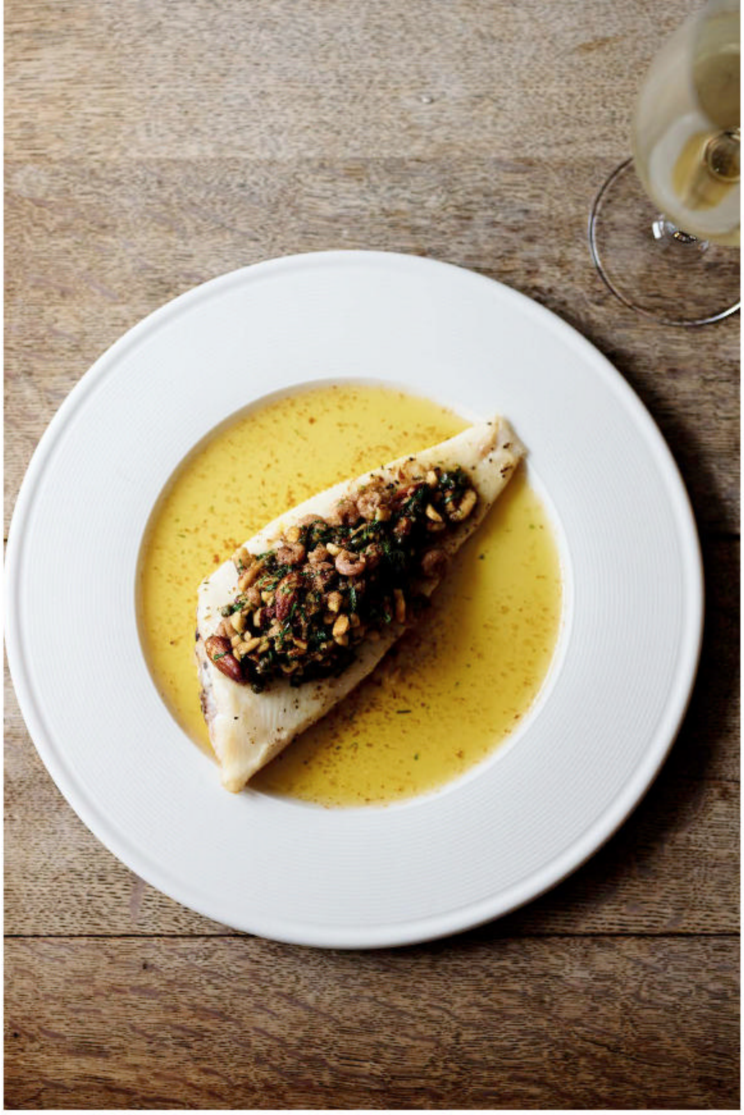

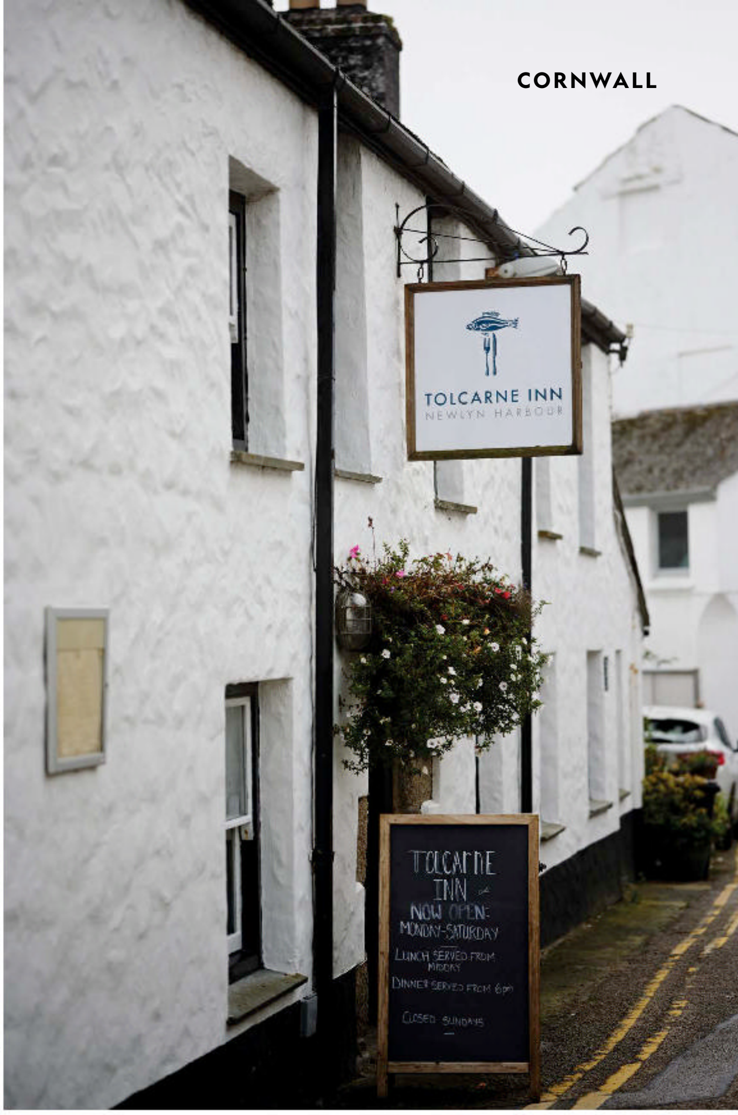
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For seafood fans, the area around Penzance and Newlyn is home to some of Cornwall's most exciting restaurants. One of these is the Tolcarne Inn — located on the quayside in Newlyn — which dates back to 1717. These days, it's owned and run by chef Ben Tunnicliffe, who settled in Cornwall in 2001, and who previously worked at the Scarlet hotel and The Abbey (where his kitchen held a Michelin star). The restaurant's daily-changing menu of fish and shellfish is based on what's been caught by local fishermen — although you can expect signature dishes such as lemon sole with shrimp, smoked almond and caper beurre noisette.

The journey from farm to plate is a short one in Cornwall, with less reliance on large wholesalers, and farmers often delivering straight to chefs. Slight Hill Farm delivers the majority of its produce directly to local restaurants, including black futsu squash. Few people are more passionate about Cornish produce than Bruce Rennie, chef and owner at The Shore Restaurant in Penzance, who bases his evening set menu on the conversations he has with growers and fishermen earlier in the day. Greeting customers at the door, he finds time to chat to tables between courses, while serving up a menu of Japanese-inspired dishes. ▯

HOW TO DO IT: Chapel House in Penzance has rooms from £160 (standard price is £195, with a 20% discount for single occupancy). chapelhousepz.co.uk. Trains to Penzance from London Paddington start at £35 each way. gwr.com

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CITY BREAK

CHICAGO

From deep-dish pizza to Michelin-starred tasting menus, this is a city that caters to all-comers

WORDS: AIMEE LEVITT

Chicago has been called many things: 'the great American city', 'the Windy City', 'the second city'... And although the latter was intended as an insult when New York-based writer A J Liebling penned it in a 1952 travelogue, Chicagoans have embraced the epithet, if only to disprove it by showing their city is second to none — especially when it comes to dining.

Perched on the southern shore of Lake Michigan, Chicago has access to so much fresh produce that farm-to-table isn't so much a novelty but more an expectation — particularly at high-end restaurants. Over the past two decades, the most interesting of these have moved from the central business district, known as the Loop, to the former industrial area, now called the West Loop. Here, on weekend evenings, diners wander the likes of Randolph and Fulton Streets, stopping for cocktails while they wait for their tables.

Yet, Chicago, as the cliche goes, is a city of neighbourhoods, and some of its best and most beloved restaurants are located in residential areas, away from downtown. Many of them share a deliberate lack of snobbishness and a willingness to mix fine and casual dining. Michelin-starred Kasama, for instance, is a cafe in West Town that serves exceptional pastries and breakfasts by day and a 13-course Filipino-inspired tasting menu by night. Meanwhile, Moody Tongue, in Bronzeville, serves as both an elegant, experimental restaurant and a brewery.

As with many major American cities, Chicago has been shaped by immigrants, as well as arrivals from elsewhere in the US. Deep-dish pizza is a beloved local speciality — which, of course, evolved from the Italian version — but there's much more besides. The city has one of the largest Mexican populations in the country, and in areas such as Pilsen and Little Village good birria (a meaty stew), tacos and carnitas (slow-cooked pork) are never far away.

Puerto Rican immigrants in Humboldt Park, meanwhile, invented the jibarito — a sandwich typically containing meat, salad and aioli, with fried green plantains instead of bread. It's now one of the city's signature foods. The city's Greek Americans, popularised gyros, spit-roasted lamb and beef in pitta bread. And black migrants from the Deep South developed 'mild sauce' — a mildly spiced blend of barbecue sauce, ketchup and hot sauce that's a key accompaniment to the fried chicken served at rival chains Harold's and Uncle Remus.

While Chicagoans might disagree over where to get the best chicken, one opinion isn't up for debate — this city, however you look at it, is first-rate for food.

A DAY IN
HYDE PARK

Seven miles south of downtown, squeezed between Washington Park and Lake Michigan, Hyde Park is a gateway to Chicago's South Side, dominated by the spires and squares of the University of Chicago.

Start your day with breakfast at **Plein Air Cafe** on the U of C (as it's known) campus, where options include pastries and coffee, breakfast sandwiches and burritos, and mascarpone-stuffed French toast. Spend the rest of the morning exploring the university, particularly the **Seminary Co-op Bookstore** and its less scholarly sibling, **57th Street Books**. Other attractions include the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed **Robie House**, and the **Oriental Institute** — a small museum with a wonderful collection of Near Eastern artifacts.

Grab lunch at **Medici on 57th**, a cosy neighbourhood institution with great burgers, then head east towards the lakefront. If the weather allows, admire the views of Lake Michigan from **Promontory Point** or ramble through the gardens, woods and meadows of **Jackson Park** before stopping for a pick-me-up at **Build Coffee**, a cafe that doubles as a community hub. If you'd rather stay inside, visit the **Museum of Science and Industry**, which contains, among other things, a chicken hatchery, a coal mine simulator and vintage aircraft.

In the evening, walk up to 53rd Street for drinks and dinner at **Virtue Restaurant & Bar**, where chef Erick Williams' menu is based on traditional Black American cuisine. Don't miss the blackened catfish, cornbread with honey butter, or fried green tomatoes topped with shrimp remoulade. Alternatively, head around the corner to superb **Jade Court** for crisp-skinned Peking duck. End the day as generations of South Siders have done, with a drink at the **Woodlawn Tap**, known to locals as Jimmy's, after its founder.

Previous pages: View of Chicago and the Lake Michigan shoreline

Clockwise from top: prime rib tartare with egg salad and potato chips at Virtue; open kitchen at Mi Tocaya; University of Chicago campus

BARS

Kumiko
Bartender Julia Momosé serves American cocktails with Japanese ingredients, plus a selection of small-batch sakes. Equal care goes into her 'spiritfree' non-alcoholic drinks, which feature unusual ingredients such as Tasmanian pepperberry and purple sweet potato vinegar. barkumiko.com

Nobody's Darling
A year into its existence, this Black- and queer-owned neighbourhood LGBTQ+ bar has already garnered national attention, both for its inventive cocktail menu, which features spirits from Black- and queer-owned breweries and distilleries, and for creating a space centred around women and femmes. nobodysdarlingbar.com

Maria's
A 'slashie' is a liquor store attached to a bar, and Maria's upgrades the concept with rare craft beers (including its own house brew) and impeccably mixed bottled cocktails. If you get hungry, owner Ed Marszewski also runs the two restaurants next door, including Polish-Korean fusion spot Kimski. community-bar.com

A DAY IN

LOGAN SQUARE & AVONDALE

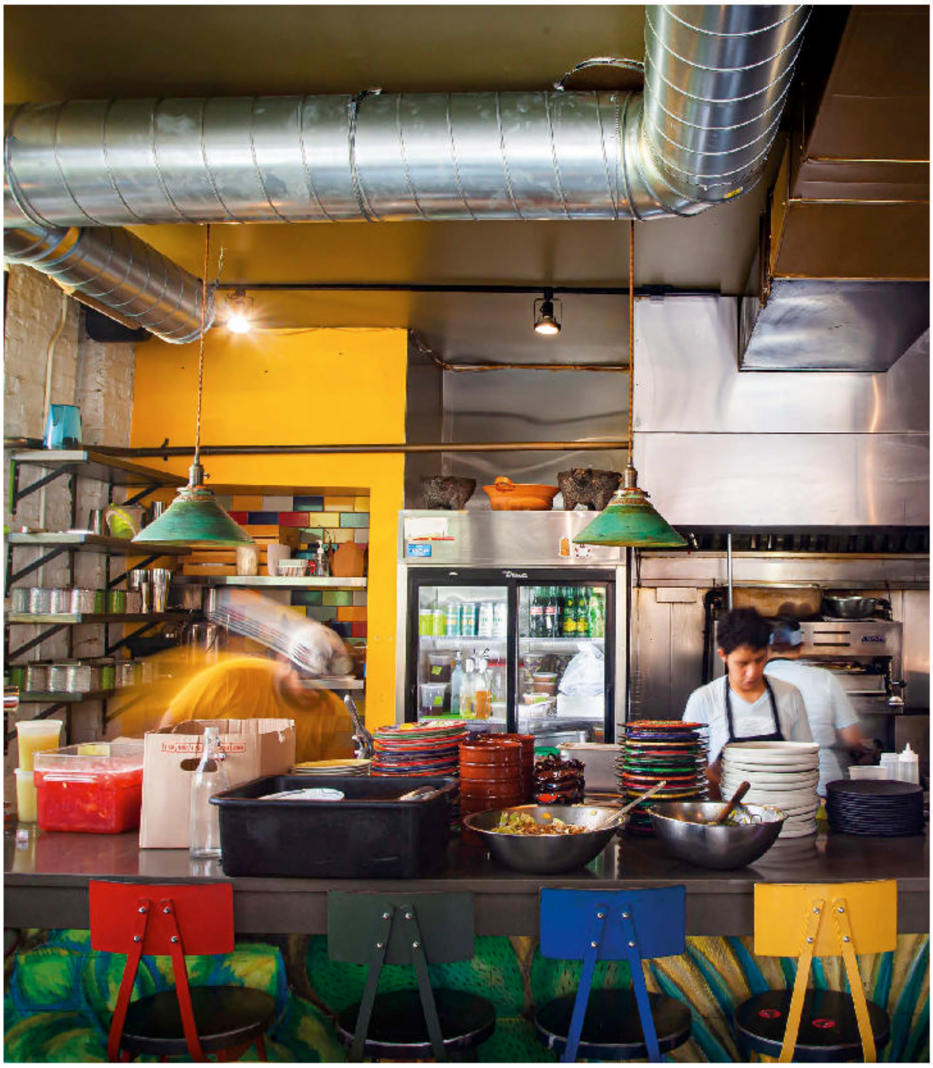
Logan Square, a sprawling residential enclave on the Northwest Side, emerged in the noughties as the epicentre of Chicago's food scene, which has since expanded into neighbouring Avondale. The major streets are lined not just with restaurants, bars and cafes, but urban farms, breweries and coffee roasters — plus a weekly farmers' market between June and October.

Begin with a very early lunch at **Honey Butter Fried Chicken**, an Avondale favourite that's open from 11am (closed Mondays) and celebrated not just for its eponymous signature dish, but also its mac and cheese. If that doesn't appeal, try **TriBecca's Sandwich Shop**, a newcomer offering deliciously overstuffed Midwestern sandwiches such as the 'horseshoe', an open-faced burger covered in fries and cheese sauce. For a sweet finish, try one of the doughnuts in inventive flavours such as chocolate and French fries.

Hire a kayak from **Wateriders Chicago** and spend a few hours paddling along the Chicago River, a journey through parks and woodlands that will make you forget you're in the middle of a big city. Afterwards, explore Logan Square, with its gorgeous, 19th-century homes, or the shopping strip of Milwaukee Avenue — including **Bric-a-Brac Records & Collectibles**, a trove of 80s memorabilia, and **Adornment + Theory**, a jewellery shop that stocks pieces created by women and people of colour.

Stop for a drink, perhaps, at **Quality Time**, a casual neighbourhood bar that serves excellent cocktails along with handmade tamales. Then, for dinner, pay a visit to **Mi Tocaya Antojería**, where chef Diana Dávila puts her own stamp on traditional Mexican dishes, including duck carnitas, enchiladas and an exceptional steak burrito. Alternatively, check out **Lula Café**, a welcoming spot serving a creative farm-to-table menu.

End the day by picking up an ice cream pop at **Pretty Cool Ice Cream** on your way to knock over a few pins at **Fireside Bowl**, or to settle in on a stool at **Rosa's Lounge** to listen to some Chicago blues.



IMAGES: VIRTUE; ALAMY; MARISA KLUG-MORATAYA; LOU MALNATI'S

PIZZERIAS

Lou Malnati's

Lou Malnati is sometimes given credit for inventing Chicago's famed deep-dish pizza (above) back in 1943, when he was a cook at Uno's, the original deep-dish restaurant. Whatever the truth, Malnati put a new spin on the form when he opened his own place by adding a buttery crust and a sausage patty covering the entire pizza. Lou Malnati's now has dozens of branches across Chicago and beyond. loumalnatis.com

Pequod's

Pequod's specialises in pan pizza, which has a thicker and chewier crust than deep dish. What makes it a cult classic among Chicago pizza lovers is the extra sprinkling of mozzarella between the crust and the pan, which creates a ring of caramelised cheese around the edge. pequodspizza.com

Vito & Nick's

While deep dish gets most of the attention from visitors, Chicagoans tend to only eat it occasionally. Usually, most turn to crispy thin crust, cut into squares. Each neighbourhood has its favourite, but Vito & Nick's has the pull to draw visitors from all over the city to the far South Side. vitoandnicks.com

Local favourite Superdawg, with its anthropomorphic rooftop hotdogs

SPOTLIGHT

HOT DOG STANDS

Chicago's strict food-handling codes mean street food such as hot dogs has had to move inside, usually to tiny, counter-service restaurants. At first, there was no seating for customers — hence the term 'stand' — but now most have stools or plastic booths.

An authentic Chicago dog consists of a Vienna beef frank sausage — either boiled or charred on a grill — topped with mustard, onions, pickle relish, a dill pickle, tomatoes, sport peppers (a type of hot pepper), and a dash of celery salt, all served in a steamed poppyseed bun. Ketchup is strongly discouraged (Chicagoans argue it ruins the balance of flavours). Find an excellent specimen at **The Wiener's Circle**, also famous for its sharp-witted counterwomen, who insult rude late-night customers.

At some stands, notably **Jim's Original**, you can find 'Polish sausage' — spicy kielbasa topped with grilled onions and mustard. And don't miss the Italian beef sandwich, a Chicago classic comprising thin-sliced spicy roast beef covered in giardiniera (a pickled relish) and dipped in jus. It was allegedly invented, and definitely perfected, at **Al's Beef**.

One particularly charming variation on the hot dog stand is **Superdawg**, an old-fashioned drive-in where carhops (wait staff) bring food out to you. Look for the giant anthropomorphic hot dogs on the roof. ◘

TASTING MENUS

Alinea

At Chicago's only three-Michelin-starred restaurant, chef Grant Achatz and his team use foams, emulsions, smoke, fog, edible balloons and plain old high-quality ingredients to create an immersive and playful dining experience unlike anything else in the city. alinearestaurant.com

Oriole

Tucked away on a quiet industrial street, Oriole may not look like much from the outside, but don't be deceived: it's one of Chicago's finest restaurants. The menu is forever changing, but you can expect lots of seafood, exquisite plating and attentive service. oriolechicago.com

Jeong

Having begun as a stall in a suburban food court, Jeong now has its own minimalist, bricks-and-mortar space. Here, chef Dave Park blends Korean and European ingredients to create a multi-course meal of modern dishes, such as chawanmushi (savoury egg custard) with Osetra caviar. jeongchicago.com

ESSENTIALS

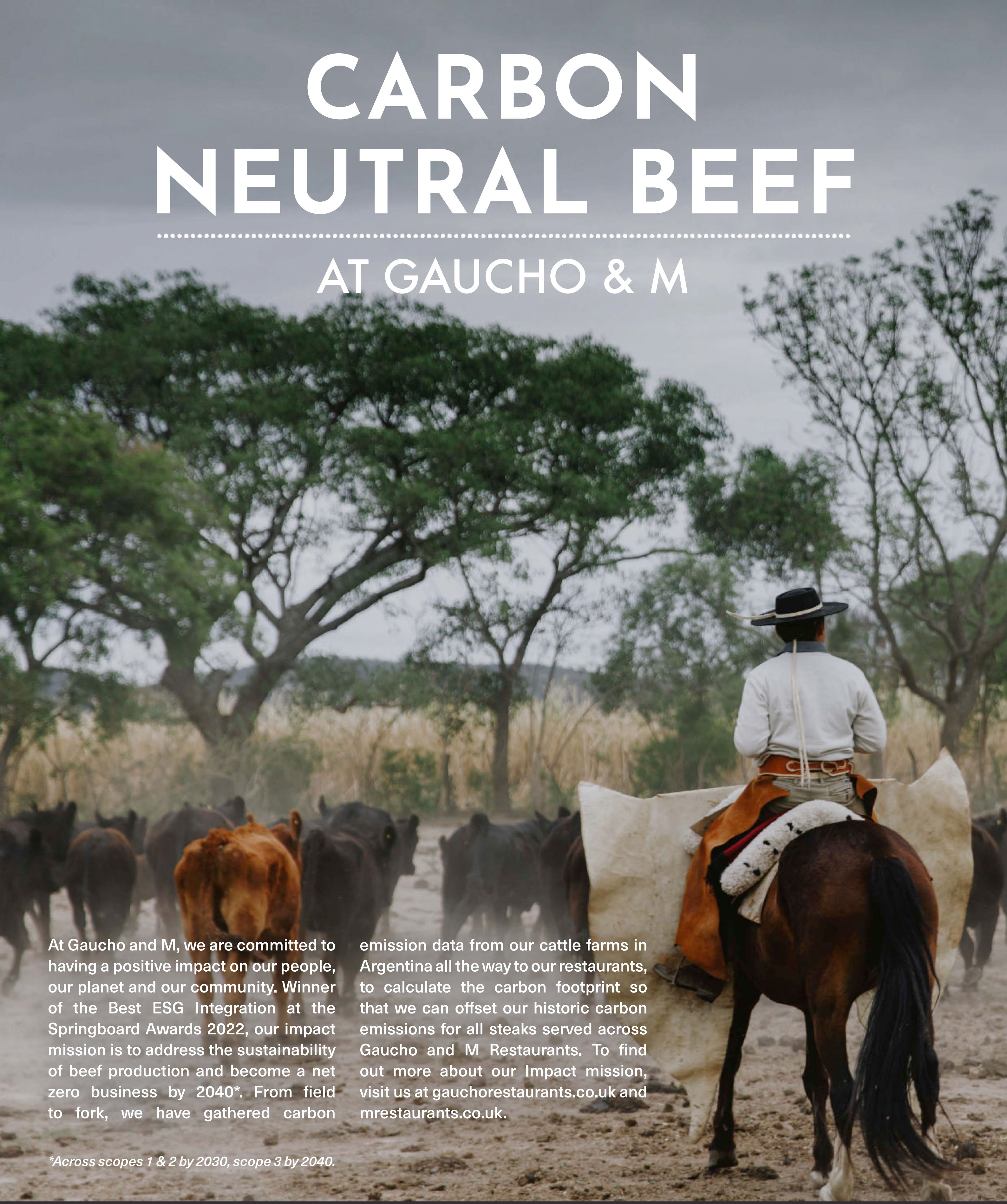
GETTING THERE
American Airlines, British Airways and United fly nonstop from Heathrow to Chicago.

WHERE TO STAY
Chicago Athletic Association hotel offers doubles from $215 (£186). chicagoathletichotel.com

HOW TO DO IT
British Airways Holidays offers five-nights' room-only at the Millennium Knickerbocker from £720 per person in March 2023, including flights. ba.com/holidays

MORE INFO
choosechicago.com

IMAGE: SUPERDAWG DRIVE-IN



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*Across scopes 1 & 2 by 2030, scope 3 by 2040.

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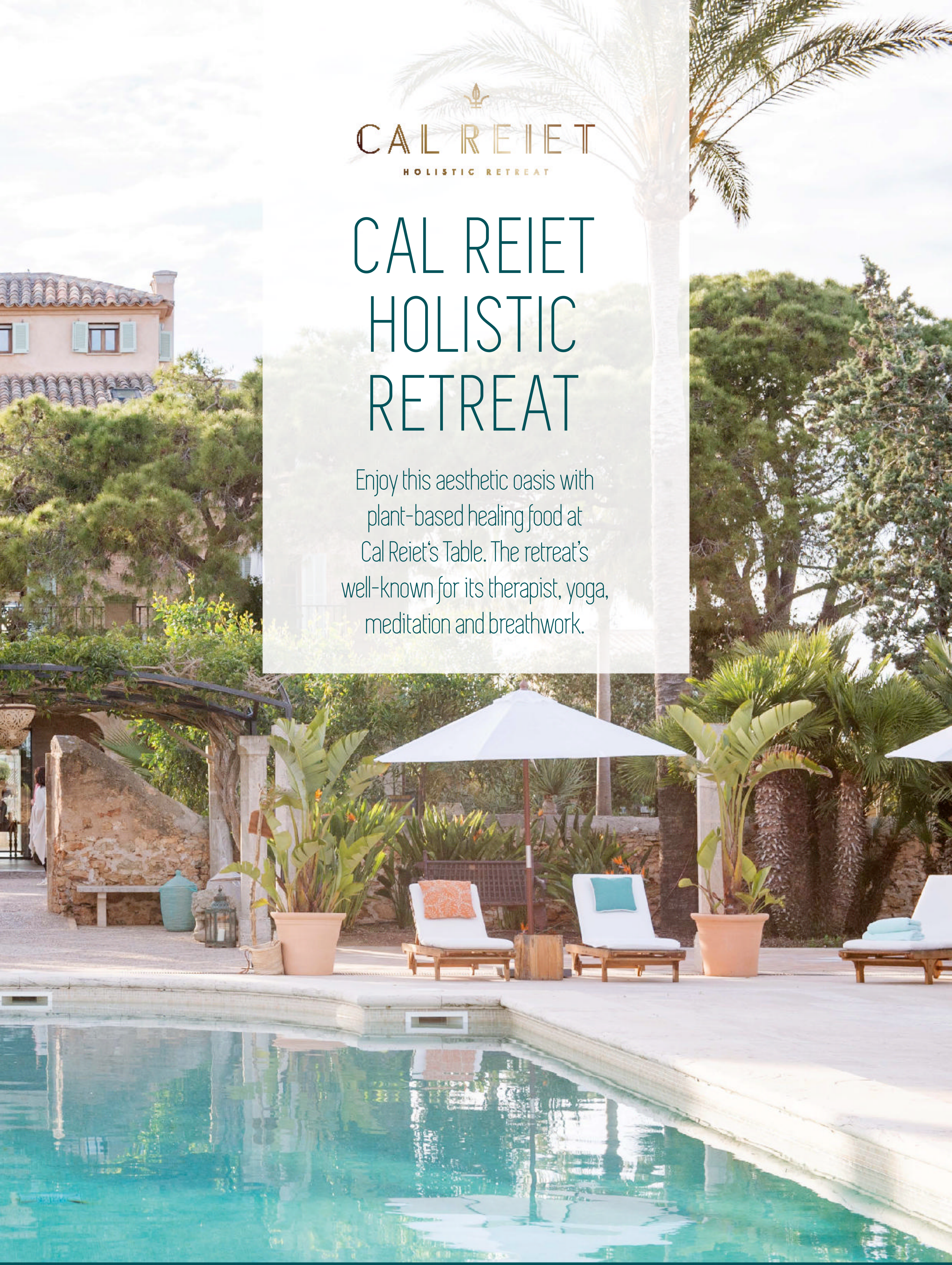

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A TASTE OF

LILLE

France's most Flemish city is home to a host of traditional local specialities, from crunchy frites and bold beers to some decidedly potent cheeses

WORDS: CAROLYN BOYD

THE OLD AND THE NEW
ESTAMINET CUISINE

Au Vieux de la Vieille, in Lille's old town, is a curious spectacle. Step inside and you'll find a space that feels like a cross between a front room and a rustic pub. Shelves are stuffed with trinkets and bric-a-brac, the ceiling is strewn with dried hops, and diners sit on and at wooden chairs and tables that have likely served generations of visitors.

This is an estaminet, a traditional tavern found across northeastern France. And the menu is almost as curious as the decor. Estaminet classics include potjevleesch, a terrine-like dish comprising four kinds of meat suspended in a cold aspic jelly (better than it sounds); carbonnades de boeuf, also known as carbonnade flamande, a rich beef stew made with beer and brown sugar; and le Welsh, the region's version of cheese and ham on toast.

When I visit, it's rammed. Although the city has plenty of modern and international restaurants, the demand for traditional regional dishes is still strong. "They started more like a bar," explains my server, Marion. "When mining was a big industry here, the miners would leave work and go to an estaminet for a beer. The tables were big, so everyone sat together and discussed life, society, everything."

I order chicken in a maroilles cheese sauce and, as I wait, soak up the lively atmosphere of friends and family having lunch together. When the piping-hot dish arrives from the kitchen, it's rich, unctuous and a great introduction to maroilles, or the "cheese of the north", as Marion helpfully describes it.

One of Northern France's most acclaimed chefs, Florent Ladeyn, knows the typical estaminet menu well, having grown up in the family restaurant, L'Auberge du Vert Mont in Boeschepe, about half an hour's drive north of Lille. "I learned to make all the classics," he says. "Potjevleesch and other meat terrines, waterzooi [a fish or chicken stew], beer tarts, chicory root flans. The traditional dishes reflect the passage of the various European armies through the region. The carbonnade flamande is a derivative of a Spanish bull stew; the potjevleesch is found in Scandinavian cuisine; the waterzooi fish stew is Belgian."

In 2007, Florent took the reins of his family's restaurant, keeping some of the estaminet spirit, but adding a hyperlocal fine-dining approach. He's also expanded, opening two innovative canteen-style restaurants, Bierbuik and Bloempot, both in Lille.

"I take my inspiration from nature, the rhythm of the seasons, the work of fishermen and market gardeners," he says. "Although the cuisine is anchored in history, respecting tradition also means making it evolve. We work with 100% local produce, so on the canteen side, with its simple menu, it means it stays lively and adaptable."

Later, I eat at Bierbuik, which, decor-wise, couldn't be more different to Au Vieux de la Vieille: it's all neon lights and metro tiles, but I love its style. Its menu is a fascinating contrast, too, with much less cheese and meat. I order a brochette of red cabbage, as dense as a cut of beef and just as tasty; the salad of pak choi, shiitake oil, buckwheat seeds and blackberries is a moreish symphony of flavours and textures; and then there are, of course, the frites. Served in a big tray, with a mustardy homemade mayonnaise, there are too many for one, but I make a good go of it. They're traditional, after all. estaminet-au-vieux-de-la-vieille-lille.fr bierbuik.fr

THE BIG CHEESE
PHILIPPE OLIVIER

The French Alps might be famous for its sheer abundance of fromage, but the Hauts-de-France region is hot on its heels. I see this for myself at the Lille branch of Philippe Olivier, which is both fromagerie and affineur, meaning it buys raw cheeses from producers and then brushes, washes and/or rotates them until the cheeses have attained the ideal maturity and taste. The shop on Rue du Cure Saint-Etienne has a huge selection, including many local specialities, such the large round mimolette, which, though inspired by Dutch edam, is distinguishable by its orange hue.

"The colour was added with the spice roucou [annatto], which was brought back from South America," says shop manager Thibaut Tournié. "Customers tend to prefer the older

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; STOCKFOOD; ANNE CLAIRE HERAUD

Carbonnade flamande, a Flemish beer and beef stew

Clockwise from above: The Lille Chamber of Commerce towers over neighbouring buildings; Florent Ladeyn; Méert patisserie

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PRODUIT DES HAUTS-DE-FRANCE
Distillerie PERSYN

versions of mimolette, which crumbles more easily and has a nutty flavour."

Although mimolette is rooted in the region, the cheese the locals really swoon over is the stinkier maroilles, which has a beer-washed rind and is traditionally aged for 100 days. There's no denying its pungent aroma, but the semi-soft cheese itself is gentler to taste, creamy even, and is served in all manner of ways: over mussels, or as a sauce with chips or even chicken. You name it, there'll be something on offer with maroilles in it.

I ask Thibaut about another variety of maroilles, the vieux boulogne, which was named by a team of experts at Cranfield University in Bedfordshire as the world's smelliest cheese for 14 years running. Thibaut gives me a block. It reeks of unwashed feet, but again, its flavour is milder. Not so the plastic pot of fort de lens, a cheese concoction that looks a little like chunky cottage cheese and has both a smell and flavour that almost knocks me out. philippeolivier.fr

LOCAL SPIRIT
GENEVER DISTILLERIES

Although the Lillois boast of their beer and breweries, there's a lesser-known drink that also calls Flanders home: genever. It's a sort of cross between whisky and gin, but in some ways it's actually gin's ancestor. Indeed, its name in English is derived from the French word for juniper, *genièvre*.

The Distillerie Claeyssens de Wambrechies was established in the suburb of Wambrechies in 1789 when the Claeyssens family, fleeing the Belgian revolution, decided to set up an oil mill on the Canal de la Deûle. Later, in 1817, it was transformed into a genever distillery. Output peaked in the 1930s when the spirit became the tipple of choice for coal miners working across the area.

These days, visitors can take a tour to find out how the drink is made. First, three different grains — malted barley, rye and oats — are ground to flour and roasted with water in copper cookers to create 'wort', which is then yeasted and cooled. This is then fermented and, finally, distilled.

At the end of the tour, as the barman pours various samples, I ask him why genever fell out of fashion. "The closure of the mines and industrialisation was the main reason," he explains. "But also the drink-driving rules!"

As I sip the genever, its 49% ABV makes my head swirl. I also try chuche morette, a blend of genever and blackcurrant liqueur, which was equally popular during the drink's heyday. To make up for the fall in genever's popularity, the distillery has expanded into brewing beer, while also producing gin, whisky and vodka. It's a move that's obviously paid off — by 2024, the building will have been transformed with the addition of a new visitor centre, complete with salon du thé and restaurant.

Genever is more commonly found in Holland and Belgium, and there are only two distilleries left in France. The other is Distillerie Persyn in Houlle, 45 miles west of Lille, which has twice won World Gin Awards. When I visit, owner Lionel Persyn admits that, while 'World's

IMAGE: ALAMY

Le Welsh

The origins of this dish differ depending on who you ask. Some locals will tell you it came with the Welsh soldiers stationed at Bainchtun, near Boulogne-sur-Mer, during the siege of Boulogne in 1544. Others will tell you it was adapted from Welsh rarebit, brought over by Welsh miners working in the coalfields. Whatever they believe, however, most locals will reel off the recipe when you ask, emphasising that the 200-250g of cheese per person is the most important element.

SERVES: 4 **TAKES: 25 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

4 slices of bread (sourdough works well), crusts removed
4 slices of ham
2-6 tsp blond beer
800g cheddar cheese (mature or mild), grated
1 tsp Dijon mustard
few dashes Worcestershire sauce
4 eggs (optional)

METHOD

① Toast the bread slices, then lay a slice of ham on top of each one.

② Pour enough beer into a non-stick saucepan to just cover the base. Place it over a medium heat and gently bring to the boil. Add the cheese and cook for 3-5 mins, stirring constantly so it doesn't stick, until melted.

③ Stir through the mustard and Worcestershire sauce, then pour the cheese mixture over the toast.

④ Heat grill to medium. Place the loaded toast under the grill for 2-3 mins, until the surface is bubbling and starting to colour.

⑤ While the toast is under the grill, fry the eggs (if using). Serve the toast straight from the grill, topping each slice with a fried egg.

Above: dining out in Lille's Place du Général de Gaulle

Best Genever' is an accolade to be proud of, with just three countries producing it, there isn't much competition. But when I taste the award-winning Long Drink brand, which is distilled four times and takes it flavour from foraged juniper berries, I feel it beats Wambrechies' offering for flavour. Seek it out in Lille's bars. distilleriedewambrechies.com genievredehoulle.com.

CHIPPING IN
LILLE'S FRITERIES

The French may have generally embraced McDonald's and its fries, but the people of Hauts-de-France loved frites long before Ronald showed up. You'll find friteries all over the region, often based in a trailer or food truck, offering steaming hot fries alongside specialities such as fricadelle sausage, or simply brochettes (kebab) and meatballs.

In Lille, the most popular is Friterie Meunier, with the queue from its Place du Général de Gaulle outlet snaking out into the square, beneath Lille's ornate stock exchange building. Buy a cone of crispy chips, which are chunkier than French fries, and choose from a huge range of sauces, from barbecue, mustard and maroilles to the popular 'Hannibal' sauce, made with tomato, onion and cayenne pepper. There are two other Friterie Meunier outlets in the centre, and plenty of other good friteries in the city. If you're venturing out to the Wambrechies district, try out La Frite à Dorer, a little roadside cabin that has twice been named best in France by the website les-friteries.com.

Meanwhile, if you prefer to 'dine in', you don't have to look far for frites. Over a weekend in Lille, I have the choice of frites with nearly every meal. This includes the classic Flemish moules-frites — the satisfyingly steamy pot of mussels with a tray of crunchy chips I devour at brasserie Aux Moules de Lille. Elsewhere, at Florent Ladeyn's Bierbuik-Bloemeke, a copious tray-full of frites comes with a delicious leek puree. I ask Florent the secret to getting chips just right. "The right potato at the right time in the season," he says. "They're then double-fried, at two different temperatures, a few hours apart. Above all, I use beef dripping, vinegar and salt." And his preferred sauce? "Smoked hay mayo." friterie-meunier.fr auxmoulesdelille.fr

ESSENTIALS

HOW TO DO IT
Return train fares from London St Pancras direct to Lille start at £78. Stay at Okko Hotel in the centre of Lille, from €105 (£90) including a snack breakfast and unlimited access to soft drinks in the 'club' area. eurostar.com okkohotels.com

MORE INFO
lilletourism.com

LILLE FAVOURITES

Beer
Lille is known for its beer, and several breweries in and around the city produce the signature brown and blond ales with an ABV of around 6.5%. Some host visitors, including Célestin, which has a number of microbreweries, one of which is in Vieux-Lille. It's run by Amaury d'Herbigny, who resurrected a family trade that dates back to 1740. celestinlille.fr

Méert waffles
A refined salon de thé and patisserie, Méert specialises in its own finely griddled waffle, filled with decadent vanilla buttercream. Both Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle were said to be fans. If you're just visiting the ornate boutique, you can choose waffles with a variety of fillings, from vanilla to chestnut, speculoos biscuits or pistachio. meert.fr

IMAGES: ALAMY; ERIC SANDER

A Taste of

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ON LOCATION

CLITHEROE

This market town in Lancashire's Ribble Valley has serious culinary credentials, from specialist sausage shops to award-winning bistros

WORDS: PAUL STAFFORD. ILLUSTRATION: TANYA COOPER

For years, Clitheroe's main claims to fame were its role in the development of the jet engine, its ignominious association with the Pendle witch trials, and — for those old enough to remember — the BBC radio programme *The Clitheroe Kid*. More recently, though, the Ribble Valley market town has made a name for itself as a culinary destination, thanks to a winning combination of established foodie favourites and exciting new openings.

Every July, Clitheroe Food Festival commandeers the marketplace and its surrounding streets to bring local artisanal produce and global cuisines to town. For the rest of the year, however, there's plenty to try at the covered stalls of Clitheroe Market, which opens on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It's been going since the 12th century and plays host to purveyors of everything from cheeses and meats to smoked Lancashire kippers. Afterwards, shoppers often head over to Castle Street, the town's central axis, dotted with pubs and shops. It slopes gently downhill from the park encircling Clitheroe Castle, a characterful little Norman keep with a big hole in its side.

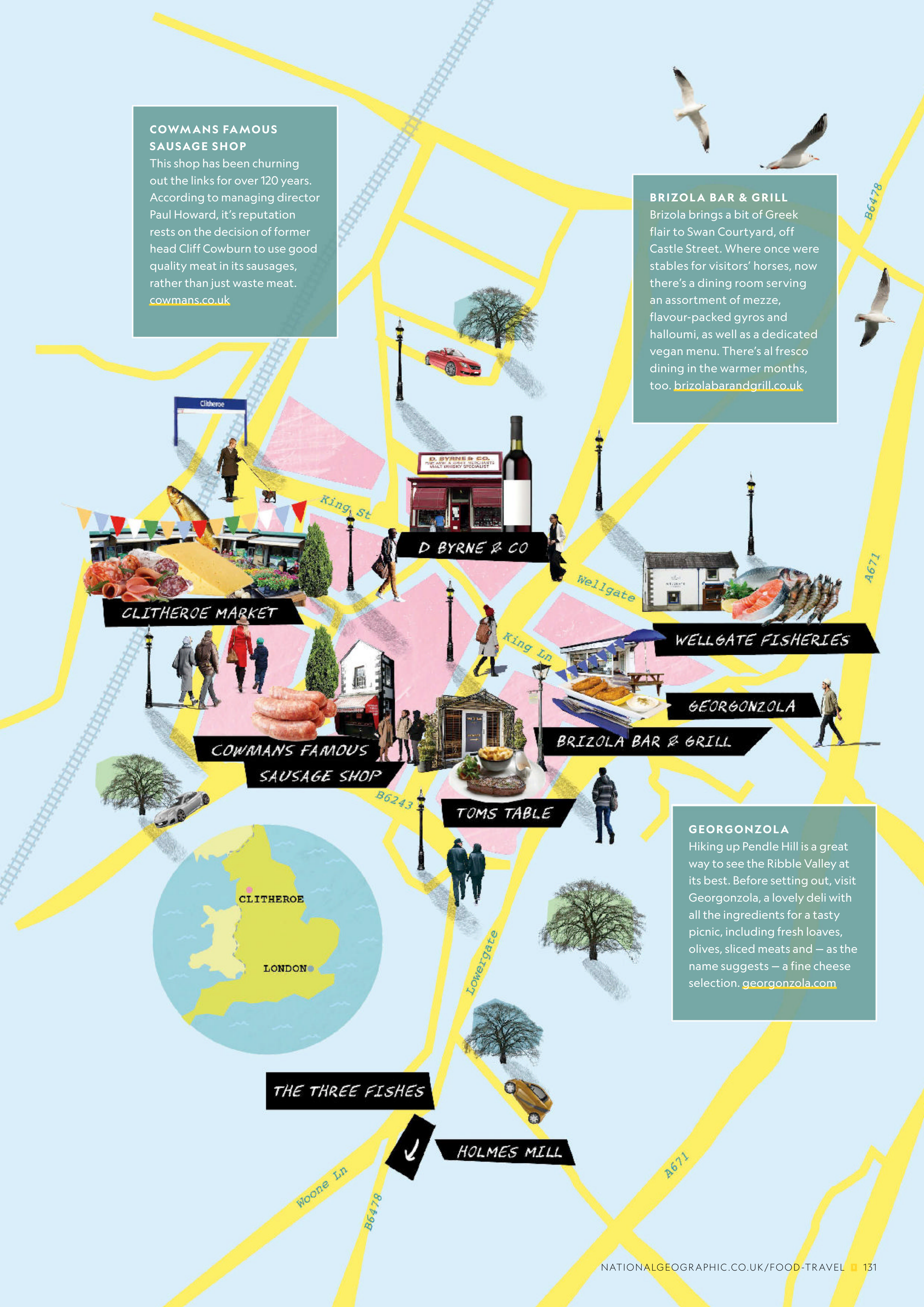
D Byrne & Co (dbyrne-finewines.co.uk), on nearby King Street, is a lovely little anachronism of a shop, dating back to the Victorian era, with a wooden ladder still used to reach the wines and spirits on the upper shelves. Pick up a flinty chablis to pair with regional seafood such as Morecambe Bay shellfish, or sea trout and whitebait from the Lune Estuary, which can be found on ice at **Wellgate Fisheries** (facebook.com/wellgatefishmongers).

One of the most exciting developments in Clitheroe over the past few years is **Holmes Mill** (holmesmill.co.uk), an ongoing project that's respectfully repurposing the town's heritage by rejuvenating a 19th-century textile mill. The first section, opened to the public in 2016, houses Bowland Beer Hall and Brewery, where the 42 hand-pull bar is one of the longest in Britain. The best seats are alongside the former boiler house's giant steam engine, which has been carefully preserved. The old weaving shed of the Grade II-listed building has since been converted into the Bowland Food Hall, with shelves and counters laden with preserves, cheeses and produce from the fields of Lancashire and beyond. The mill's former spinning block, meanwhile, now houses a hotel, and the Distillery Bar & Grill.

Toms Table (tomstable.co.uk), is another recent addition. Opened at the height of the pandemic, it was named best restaurant in Lancashire at the England Business Awards in September. Chef Tom Drinkall spent eight years working in kitchens in France, and that influence shows in his French-inspired bistro menu, which has garnered fans for its locally sourced steaks — including an imaginative vegetarian version made with beetroot.

For fine dining, take a trip to **The Three Fishes** (thethreefishes.co.uk), a few miles away in Great Mitton, a small village that inspired JRR Tolkien when he was creating Middle Earth. Nigel Haworth — who earned a Michelin star at nearby Northcote — reopened the doors here after an extensive refurb in late 2021, offering a delicious take on traditional pub cooking. Haworth is passionate about ingredients, and when he's not growing his own veg he's sourcing top-quality local produce, something this corner of Lancashire has in spades.

HOW TO DO IT: Trains from Manchester Victoria to Clitheroe take an hour and 15 minutes. The 280 bus runs to Preston and Skipton (45 minutes either way). Holmes Mill's 1823 Spinning Block hotel has doubles from £75, room only.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COWMANS FAMOUS SAUSAGE SHOP
This shop has been churning out the links for over 120 years. According to managing director Paul Howard, it's reputation rests on the decision of former head Cliff Cowburn to use good quality meat in its sausages, rather than just waste meat. cowmans.co.uk

BRIZOLA BAR & GRILL
Brizola brings a bit of Greek flair to Swan Courtyard, off Castle Street. Where once were stables for visitors' horses, now there's a dining room serving an assortment of mezze, flavour-packed gyros and halloumi, as well as a dedicated vegan menu. There's al fresco dining in the warmer months, too. brizolabarandgrill.co.uk

GEORGONZOLA
Hiking up Pendle Hill is a great way to see the Ribble Valley at its best. Before setting out, visit Georgonzola, a lovely deli with all the ingredients for a tasty picnic, including fresh loaves, olives, sliced meats and — as the name suggests — a fine cheese selection. georgonzola.com

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Budapest

Dining at Babel

Hubert Hlatky-Schlichter, owner of the Michelin-starred Babel restaurant, on his favourite dish, cooking style, and honouring Hungarian heritage

IMAGES: ATI BOLDOG. INTERVIEW: FARIDA ZEYNALOVA

There's just no stopping Babel; since it opened in 2008, the highly acclaimed restaurant in downtown Budapest has not only earned itself a Michelin star and Decanter UK Best International Restaurant, but it's quickly become one of the leading names on the regional food scene. Owner Hubert details what makes the restaurant tick.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN BABEL RECEIVED A MICHELIN STAR IN 2019?
I cried — I couldn't believe it! I was so grateful because it was the result of 11 years of sacrifices. I remembered all the times I was away from my family, how much time and energy it took. My dream became a reality.

DESCRIBE BABEL'S COOKING STYLE.
It's 'à la minute' — everything has to be fresh, and we want to affect the emotions, the senses, play with temperatures. We're proud of our Hungarian gastronomic heritage, which is the basis of our modern style of cooking. We strive for harmony — the flavours of the kitchen must match perfectly with the wine, for example.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE DISH?
The Casino egg — not many people know it was the only traditional dish in Hungarian gastronomy to contain caviar. It used to be on the menus of Budapest's famous restaurants in the times of peace, but, during the socialist era, it was dumbed down and relegated to cold dishes. Caviar was only included as decoration, and eventually disappeared off the menu. I have a personal attachment to this dish. At family events, my husband makes his own version. So these are some of the reasons why it made it onto the menu at Babel. It's since become our signature dish.

WHAT'S THE FUTURE FOR BABEL?
It's an evolution, which is the essence of life, but it applies to our restaurant, too. We've come a long way since opening, but the best is yet to come. For example, building a sustainable work environment is key for us. One of our plans is to build a vegetable garden to use together with Kiosk Budapest, our sibling restaurant.

For more information on the team behind Babel, visit babel-budapest.hu

B A B E L

BOOKS

HOME COMFORTS

THE FIRST BOOK FROM COINNEACH MACLEOD, AKA THE HEBRIDEAN BAKER, CELEBRATES THE FLAVOURSOME PRODUCE OF THE HEBRIDES, FROM FRESH FISH TO AWARD-WINNING BLACK PUDDING

How would you describe the cuisine of the Hebrides?
Our food is very simple; lamb and mutton are our traditional meats and potatoes are our traditional vegetables. We use mutton because we can't really grow lambs big enough here unless we move them to the mainland to fatten up, so we have to keep them for longer. There's a bit of snobbery around mutton elsewhere — that it's not as good as lamb — but in the Hebrides, the animals are fed on heather hills that give them a really distinctive flavour, which I love. And our potatoes are grown on the machair, fertile grasslands by the beaches; I think that makes them the tastiest in the world.

What shapes Hebridean food culture?
The food culture in the Hebrides is influenced by a few things. The first is our landscape. We have a very harsh, dramatic landscape and not much grows on the islands. We also have a very long winter. In the deepest winter, we only have four or five hours of daylight, so hearty, wholesome foods play a big part in our diet at that time of year. And we live a very hard working, outdoor lifestyle here — most people have two or three jobs. Fresh produce is hard to come by during winter as well so it's really important to plan ahead; everyone keeps a casserole or two in the freezer.

What was the food like growing up and how has it changed since?
My mum shopped in Stornoway, the main town [on Lewis and Harris] once or twice a year, and everything else was homegrown. Growing up on a small farm, we had about 400 sheep. My father was also a trawler fisherman, so langoustine and wonderful fish was so, so important. It was like that for almost everyone on the island. Things have changed of course, and Stornoway now has bigger supermarkets, but the traditional produce is still the same as it was 20, 50 or even 100 years ago. The difference now is that people are taking what's always been a part of our islands and trying it in different ways. We're also seeing the opening of some beautiful restaurants that really celebrate our produce.

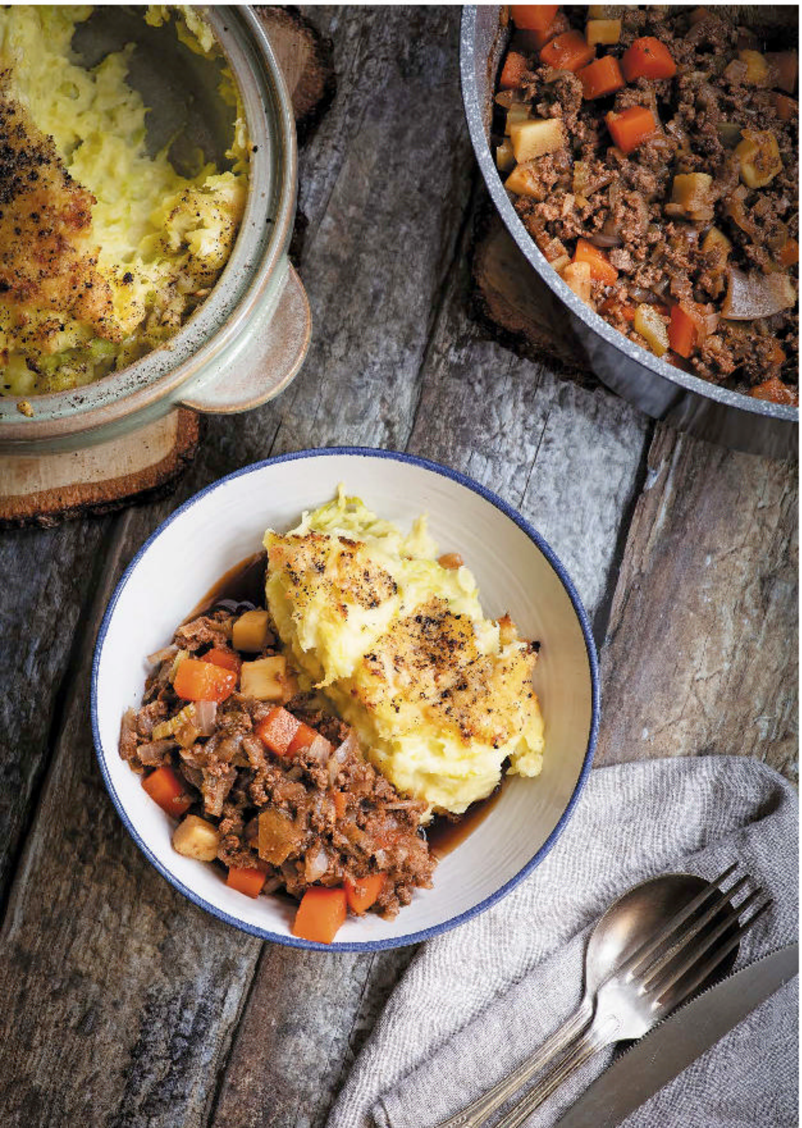
My Scottish Island Kitchen
THE HEBRIDEAN BAKER
COINNEACH MACLEOD

The Hebridean Baker: My Scottish Island Kitchen, by Coinneach MacLeod (£26, Black & White Publishing)

What are some Hebridean specialities?
The butchers in Stornoway make the best black pudding — people travel from all over the world for it and it's won awards. You always see a queue out of the door for this delicacy. It's a very distinctive flavour but some ingredients are secret, of course. There are three butchers you can go to — [two branches of] MacLeod and MacLeod, and Charles MacLeod — and when I see Stornoway black pudding on the menu in Edinburgh, I try to find out which MacLeod butcher made it — Charles MacLeod's is my favourite. We also have a cake called duff — they say if you want a Hebridean man or woman, make them a duff and you'll be married by the next week. It's a simple boiled fruit cake, but it has this distinctive skin around it that's very Marmite — you either love it or you hate it. Day one, it's eaten as a slice with a hot cup of coffee. Day two, you have it as a dessert with a nice lashing of custard all over it. But everyone waits for day three, when you have it as part of a Hebridean breakfast, fried with bacon and sausage. That was a treat growing up; it's still my treat today. You can find a variation of duff in any cafe run by a Hebridean local.

What are your favourite recipes from your book?
There are a lot. There are the traditional ones — like the duff, which is a recipe my aunt's made for 70 years — but also ones where I looked at a classic recipe and gave it a twist. For example, we have a lot of soups that are well known in Scotland, like cullen skink and cock-a-leekie soup. I took the flavours in the soup and made them into a pie, and it's something that really stood out when I tried it on family and friends. But as the Hebridean Baker, one of my favourites is my hot toddy bundt cake. You can have whisky twice and not feel guilty about it: once in the cake and once in the hot mug beside you. *Interview: Qin Xie*

IMAGES: SUSIE LOWE; GETTY; AWL IMAGES



Dun Carloway, Iron Age ruins on the island of Lewis and Harris

Clockwise from left: mince and tatties; Stornoway, Lewis and Harris's main town; Coinneach's take on a croque madame

Shortbread dips

This beloved biscuit has been made in Scotland for hundreds of years. It's widely regarded that it came to prominence thanks to Mary, Queen of Scots, who's said to have fallen in love with the shortbread served to her by French chefs. From then on, it became the iconic Scottish biscuit we all adore today. This version still has the butteriness of traditional shortbread, but with added indulgence from the white and dark chocolate.

MAKES: 12 **TAKES: 1 HR 15 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

- 300g soft unsalted butter
- 125g golden caster sugar
- 300g plain flour
- 50g cornflour
- 150g dark chocolate
- 150g white chocolate
- 2 tbsp chopped pistachios
- 2 tbsp freeze-dried raspberries

METHOD

1 Heat oven to 170C, 150C fan, gas 3. Grease and line a 20cm square baking tin.

2 Beat the butter and sugar in a bowl until pale and fluffy. Add in both the flours and ½ tsp salt, and stir until it begins to combine, taking care not to overwork the dough. Bring the dough together with your hands and press the mixture into your prepared tin. Flatten the surface with the back of a spoon and use a fork to prick all over.

3 Bake for 45 mins, until pale golden. Using a knife, score lines where you're going to cut the shortbread into fingers. Leave to cool completely in the tin.

4 Set two heatproof bowls over two saucepans of gently simmering water. Break the dark chocolate into one and the white chocolate into the other. While the chocolate is melting, remove the shortbread from the tin and cut it into fingers.

5 When the chocolate has melted, use a teaspoon to coat one-third of each finger with the chocolate — do half the batch white and half dark. Sprinkle pistachios or freeze-dried raspberries over the chocolate end and allow to set. The shortbread will keep in an airtight container for up to four days.

IMAGES: SUSIE LOWE

Stornoway scotch eggs

Adding the rich, well-seasoned flavours of Stornoway black pudding to your sausage meat makes these the tastiest scotch eggs you'll ever eat. They're not as challenging to create as people think either, and you'll be rewarded with a hearty snack.

SERVES: 4 **TAKES: 30 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

6 eggs (4 for soft boiling, 2 beaten)
6 good-quality pork sausages
275g Stornoway black pudding
200g plain flour
200g panko breadcrumbs
vegetable oil, for deep frying

METHOD

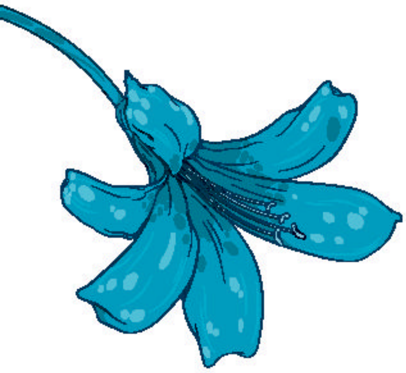
1 Set a pan of boiling water over a medium heat. Lower in 4 of the eggs and cook for 7 mins. While they're cooking, prepare a bowl of ice-cold water. When the eggs are done, transfer them immediately to the icy water to stop the cooking process. Once cooled, peel and set aside.

2 Remove the sausage meat from the skins and add to a large bowl, along with the black pudding. Season well with salt and black pepper, mix it all together, then split into four equal portions.

3 Prepare three shallow bowls: add the flour to one, crack the 2 remaining eggs into the second bowl and lightly beat, then add the breadcrumbs to the third.

4 Take one portion of the sausage mixture, flatten it out in your hand and wrap evenly around an egg. Roll it in the flour, then the egg, then finally the breadcrumbs to completely coat. Set aside and repeat for the remaining eggs.

5 Half-fill a large saucepan with vegetable oil and heat until it reaches 180C on a thermometer (or until a few breadcrumbs turn golden after 10 secs in the oil). Carefully lower in 2 scotch eggs and cook for 8 mins, turning occasionally, until golden and crisp. Rest on some kitchen paper while you repeat for the other 2 eggs. Serve either warm or cold.



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Cullen skink tart

The flavours of cullen skink — a thick Scottish soup made from smoked haddock, potatoes and onions — lend themselves perfectly to this tart. To make this an easy weekend dish, you could use a pre-made shortcrust pastry case, but this one is homemade.

SERVES: 4 **TAKES: 90 MINS**

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE PASTRY

120g plain flour
60g cold unsalted butter, diced

FOR THE FILLING

1 tbsp unsalted butter
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
2 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into small cubes
1 leek, trimmed and sliced
300g smoked haddock
200ml whole milk
1 bay leaf
100ml double cream
3 medium eggs
2 tbsp chopped chives

METHOD

1 Sift the flour into a large bowl and mix in a pinch of salt. Add the butter and, with your fingertips, rub it into the flour until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.

2 Slowly sprinkle over 2 tbsp iced water and, with a knife, work it gently into the crumbs until you have added just enough to form a soft dough. Work it into a ball, then wrap with cling film and chill in the fridge for 1 hr.

3 Prepare a 20cm tart tin. Roll out the chilled pastry so it's slightly larger than the tin. Press the pastry into the tin then trim the edges using a sharp knife. Prick the base with a fork and chill in the fridge for 30 mins.

4 Meanwhile, heat the oven to 190C, 170C fan, gas 5. Line the chilled pastry case with baking paper and fill with baking beans or uncooked rice. Bake for 12 mins, then remove the paper and beans. Return to the oven for 5 mins, until golden; set aside to cool.

5 Reduce oven to 180C, 160C fan, gas 4. Next, make the filling. Melt the butter in a saucepan set over a low-medium heat. Add the onion, potatoes and leek, and cook them all gently for 10 mins, stirring every now and then. Set aside.

6 Add the fish, milk and bay leaf to another saucepan. Place over a medium heat and poach for 5 mins. Lift out the fish, saving the milk, then flake it into the cooked veg and stir well. Pour the reserved milk into a jug and whisk in the cream, eggs and chives. Season well with salt and pepper.

7 Tip the fish and veg mixture into the pastry case, then pour over the milk mixture until the case is full. Bake for 30 mins, until set and toasty brown on top. Serve warm or cold.

IMAGE: SUSIE LOWE

NEW RELEASES

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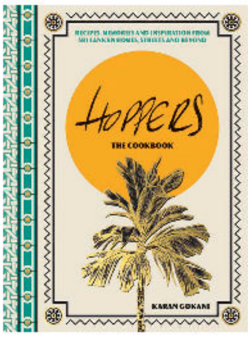
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Hoppers
THE COOKBOOK
KARAN GOKANI

OUR PICK

HOPPERS: THE COOKBOOK

Karan Gokani

As co-founder and creative director of Sri Lankan restaurant chain Hoppers, Karan Gokani is no stranger to big flavours. And his first recipe book is full of them, from devilled dishes to spiced snacks.

Hoppers: The Cookbook is an ode to the country and cuisine Gokani has spent years exploring, interspersing recipes with travel tips, stories and celebrations of the people he's met along the way. There are detailed guides to the Sri Lankan larder, too, showcasing essential herbs, spices and curry powders, as well as simple substitutions for hard-to-find ingredients.

Among the recipes are many of Gokani's signature dishes, including bone marrow varuval — beef bones in a rich, spiced coconut-based sauce. And, of course, there's also a recipe for hoppers: crispy, bowl-shaped pancakes made from fermented rice and coconut, which serve as the perfect vehicle for the heady chutneys, curries and sambals found elsewhere in the book.

Other highlights include mini dosas and hot buttered squid, as well as what's described as Gokani's 'desert island dish', lamprais — rice, curry and sambol, wrapped in banana leaves. *£30, Quadrille*

BEST OF THE REST

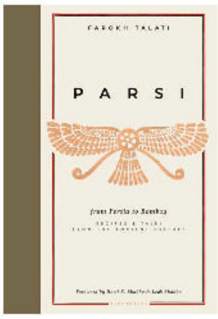
Eastern European baking and desserts from Romania and beyond
TAVA
Irina Georgescu

IN THE OVEN

Tava

Irina Georgescu

In her new cookbook, Georgescu showcases Eastern Europe's diverse range of sweet and savoury baked goods. Alongside recipes such as honey-soaked brioche, she weaves in folklore tales from Romania's culinary history, as well as advice on travel and traditional cooking techniques. *£27, Hardie Grant*


FAROKH TALATI
PARSI
from Persia to Bombay

FUSION FEAST

Parsi

Farokh Talati

Head chef of London's St John Bread & Wine, Talati has delved into his Parsi heritage to create this collection. Descending from Persian Zoroastrian migrants to India, Parsis use a fusion of flavours in their cooking. Recipes include lamb stewed with cinnamon and Hunza apricots. *£18.20, Bloomsbury*

WORDS: CHLOÉ BRAITHWAITE.
IMAGES: RYAN WIJAYARATNE

Black pork curry

The almost coffee-like dark roasted spice powder used here, balanced with the fat from the pork belly and smoky citrus from the goraka, is a match made in heaven. It's crucial to ensure these three elements are in perfect harmony. You can use shop-bought madras curry powder, but it's worth making the Sri Lankan blend – you'll notice the difference.

SERVES: 4

TAKES: 1 HR PLUS 1 HR MARINATING

INGREDIENTS

500g pork belly, skin-off and fat cap trimmed to no more than 1cm, cut into 5cm pieces
1¼ tbsp chilli powder
2 tbsp vegetable or rapeseed oil
5cm cinnamon stick
5 green cardamom pods
4 cloves
8-12 curry leaves
5cm piece pandan leaf
5cm piece lemon grass
1 small onion, peeled and finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
2½cm piece of ginger, peeled and grated
1 large piece goraka, left whole (or 1½ tbsp tamarind extract)
3 tbsp roasted curry powder (shop-bought or make your own – see recipe online)
2 green chillies, halved lengthways

METHOD

① Combine the pork with ½ tbsp of the chilli powder, 1 tsp coarsely ground black pepper and ½ tsp salt. Cover and set aside for 1 hr to marinate.

② Heat the oil in a deep, heavy-based pan set over a medium heat. Add the cinnamon, cardamom and cloves, cook for 30 secs, then add the curry leaves, pandan leaf, lemon grass, onion, garlic and ginger. Cook for about 4 mins, until the onion turns slightly brown.

③ Add the remaining ¾ tbsp chilli powder, the goraka and 1 tsp salt; cook for 1 min. Add a splash of water to get the charred bits off the bottom of the pan and stir well. Add the pork and coat well in the spices, then pour in just enough water to cover the meat. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover and cook for about 30 mins, until the meat is tender.

④ Add the curry powder and cook for a further 10 mins. This is traditionally a dry curry but if you prefer a little bit of sauce, add some water in the final stage of cooking and adjust the seasoning accordingly. Stir in the green chillies and cook for a final 2 mins, then serve straight away.

GIGGLING SQUID
Tantalising Thai to cook at home

THAI TAPAS

The Giggling Squid Cookbook

Giggling Squid

This recipe collection from the chefs at the Giggling Squid Thai restaurant chain features recollections from Pranee Laurillard, who, along with husband Andy, launched her first restaurant two decades ago. Look out for signature dishes such as Golden Money Bags (spiced chicken and veg in pastry bundles). *£25, Ebury*

OREN
ODED OREN

TEL AVIV TIME

Oren

Oded Oren

Each of the 10 chapters in Oren's first book celebrates one of the staple ingredients the East London-based chef grew up with in Tel Aviv. The recipes work both as standalone dishes and as part of a mezze-style spread. Don't miss the baked butter beans with barrel-aged feta and slow-roast tomatoes. *£26, Hardie Grant*

DINE OUT

RESTAURANT ST BARTS

LONDON • RESTAURANT-STBARTS.CO.UK

AN EXTENSIVE, HIGHLY CREATIVE, EVER-CHANGING TASTING MENU IS ON OFFER AT THIS PETITE RESTAURANT WITH GRAND AMBITIONS

St Barts is a challenging restaurant, and the first challenge is finding it. It manages to confuse Google Maps and indeed potential diners, as there's no discernible sign or any other indication that it is a restaurant. In fact, it looks rather like a block of flats. But not so once you're inside — step through its doors and the first thing you see is executive chef Johnnie Crowe and his sous chef at work in a kitchen that isn't so much open as part of the dining room itself.

It's a small place — with just four tables in use on the Thursday lunchtime of our visit — but a pretty one, with vast picture windows looking out onto the 12th-century St Bartholomew the Great church.

The decor might be muted — terracotta walls and rough-hewn wooden tables that look like they've come directly from the tree surgeon — but the food is quite the opposite. There's only a tasting menu: 15 courses in the evening at £120 or six at lunch for £60.

It's the third restaurant from Luke Wasserman and Toby Neill — they also have Nest in Hackney and Fenn in Fulham, but St Barts is of a different order. It's quite clearly stretching for a Michelin star, and may get one in due course, but the menu is currently something of a curate's egg. The idea behind it is hyper-seasonal and ever changing, with each plate containing only three ingredients. This is a challenge for any chef and here sometimes it works and sometimes, not quite.

The first dish to arrive at the table is a beetroot, hibiscus and duck liver macaron, which is dainty, rich and toothsome. The next is mullet with kohlrabi, which looks beautiful, the fish flaking almost like paper — alas, it tastes quite like paper, too.

Next up, a slightly confusing dish of molten Lancashire cheese and sourdough ends. The cheese overwhelms like Genghis Khan. Crab meat muffins with ginger and horseradish follow, and these are things of beauty; as light as a feather but packing a real punch in terms of flavour.

The real standout comes straight after. Duck done four ways: tender slices of duck breast with just about every other bit of the animal worked into accompaniments. It's sensational — so rich, so ribboned with fat, so perfectly prepared. The last course is a small chunk of Hackney honey and lavender dessert — half cake and half custard tart, but wholly lovely. As is the wine list, which is the length of the Dead Sea Scrolls and ranges from £10 for a glass of Timorasso to £210 for a bottle of Franck Pascal Blanc de Noirs.

Restaurant St Barts is an operatic experience — the waiters move like dancers and the food is thoughtful and clever, but the experience can be a touch long-winded, which, perhaps, might be expected with only two chefs at work. It's refined almost to the point of pretension, but one thing it isn't is dull. *Around £180 for two with wine. Samuel Muston*

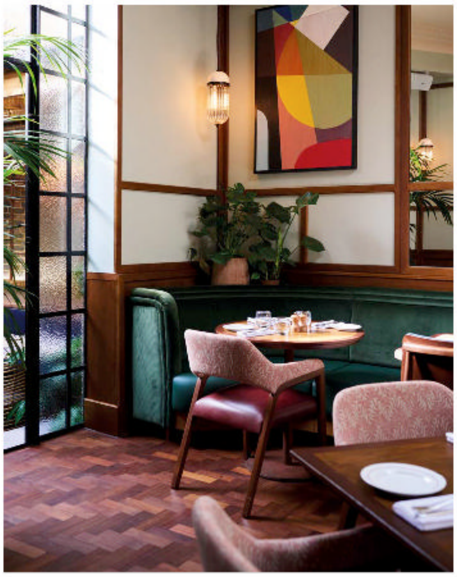
ORELLE

BIRMINGHAM • ORELLE.CO.UK

The huge floor-to-ceiling windows are the first things you notice when entering Orelle, offering views over the city's skyline from the 24th floor. However, the opulent interior with its sweeping booths is almost as much of a feast for the eyes.

The food is billed as modern French, with a menu featuring classics like beef tartare, dressed crab and the obligatory cote de boeuf. Light cream cheese-filled gougères as amuse-bouches are followed by a memorable platter of oysters — some fried, their crispy coatings giving way to a pleasant creaminess, while others served simply with a piquant mignonette. A starter of barbecued hen of the woods is doused in an earthy, umami-laden veloute and somehow trumps the tartare. The dry-aged faux-filet comes with a moreish peppercorn béarnaise, but it's the pork main that really wins the day — a combination of suckling pig and melt-in-the-mouth pork belly is served with plum, onion and girolles, all doused in a rich jus.

Proceedings are brought to a pleasantly indulgent end with a dessert trolley bearing row upon row of perfect French patisserie. Service is professional, although not speedy, but with food and views like this, Orelle isn't a place where you want to rush your dinner. *Around £150 for two with wine. Ellen Manning*



TUTTO

BRIGHTON • TUTTO-RESTAURANT.CO.UK

Set on the fringe of the bohemian North Laine shopping area, this contemporary Italian is located in a former 1930s banking hall. In the small, buzzy back dining room, we start with an elegant foresta nera cocktail (Monkey 47 sloe gin, charred lemon cordial and cherry bitters).

One warm, creamy chunk of lasagne crochetta, freshly deep-fried, sprinkled lightly with velvety parmesan and brought to life when dipped into tangy herby tomato sauce, and I'm wholly on board with the restaurant's tagline: 'bring everyone, eat everything'.

The beautifully presented silky burrata with soft black figs, pine nuts and basil is delectable, only marred by the slightly undercooked aubergine in the accompanying autumnal caponata. The pasta, however, is my highlight — soft, thick ribbons of pappardelle topped with generous sweet chunks of chianti slow-braised beef shin and onion pangritata melt in the mouth, and go perfectly with a Barbera Appassimento Piemonte. Meanwhile, the tagliolini, with Cornish crab, chilli and bottarga, packs a garlicky punch.

Make room for some light and flaky sea bass, a side of crispy new potatoes with rosemary salt, and finally a boozy tiramisu for dessert, and you'll be talking about the food at Tutto for years to come. *Around £50 per person with wine. Ellie Seymour*

IMAGES: JEAN CAZALS; TIM ATKINS PHOTOGRAPHY; STEVEN JOYCE; DAVID CHARBITT

MEXA

LONDON • ARCADEFOODHALL.COM

For anyone mourning the closure of Hackney's Sonora Taquería, Michelle Salazar de la Rocha and Sam Napier have launched Mexa, in the shiny-glass, bass-pumping Arcade Food Hall at the eastern end of Oxford Street. And while the location is, in every sense, new territory for the pair, their loyal following will find familiar terrain in the tortillas that made Sonora a hit.

The soft, golden tacos are the headline act, and come piled high with toppings: slow-cooked pork carnitas, confit brisket or nopales — strips of grilled cactus along with a crumbling of salty cheese. The quesadillas, too, are a winner, with a lamb birria option, the smoky hunks of shoulder a delight, dunked into a side of dark, meaty consommé. Meanwhile, the gobernadora quesadilla, an in-your-face Mexican classic of prawns and melted cheese, comes with a side of fiery salsa roja that cuts cleanly through the cheese — and the thumping music of Arcade — like an axe.

There are good fish options, too: prawn aguachile — fresh prawns, thin rounds of cucumber and red onion in a pool of lime-heavy sourness, best heaped onto crunchy totopos (tortilla chips) and quickly ferried to the mouth. It's the priciest option at £13, but not the star: the sea bass ceviche — citrussy slivers of fish, swirls of mayo and punchy salsa negra on a crispy tostada — is gone in minutes.

With just nine dishes on the menu, you might be tempted to order the lot — and why not? Earplugs, however, are optional. *Dishes from £5-£13. Connor McGovern*

EAT & STAY

THE DOUBLE RED DUKE

CLANFIELD, COTSWOLDS • COUNTRYCREATURES.COM/DOUBLE-RED-DUKE

OPEN-FIRE COOKING AND SEASONAL INGREDIENTS ARE THE FOCUS AT THIS COSY COTSWOLDS HIDEAWAY

Is there such a thing as the perfect aubergine dip? I'd say the wood-fired miso-flavoured version I'm presented with at The Double Red Duke must come pretty close. Mixed with sesame seeds, mint leaves and the silkiest of olive oils, it's a smooth, creamy, smoky starter, just tangy enough to make my mouth tingle. If dinner was just a bottomless tub of it, I'd be quite content.

In reality, there's plenty more to come. I've eschewed the main courses and instead ordered a handful of small plates, to get a good taste of what's on offer at this cosy 17th-century coaching inn. Here, the kitchen is headed up by Swedish chef Henrik Ritzén, formerly of fine seafood restaurant Fiskekrogen in Gothenburg. The dishes are made from locally sourced ingredients, with most cooked over an open fire using cherry and apple wood from just down the road.

Although the aubergine dip set the bar high, the three seafood plates that follow don't disappoint: the raw rock oysters are complemented perfectly by the juice of elderflower and dill mignonette; the scallops with parsley and garlic butter are packed full of flavour; and the tower of sponge-soft crab piled onto a rye brioche is offset beautifully by zingy pickled kohlrabi. A refreshing glass of vinho verde washes everything down nicely.

Last out is the middle white pork, which has been slow cooked overnight and is so tender it barely needs cutting. I put a bit of everything on my fork for that first bite — the pork, fennel and glazed cabbage — and smear it in a pool of the tamarind sauce. The blackened skin crackles before yielding to the softness of the loin, the combination of flavours at once sweet, tangy and deliciously comforting. Then I top off the night with a refreshing mango pavlova and a potent tequila old fashioned before tottering off to bed.

My garden-facing room comes with vintage-style wooden furniture and is decorated with flashes of red, black and cream. The highlight is the bed — it's spacious and comfortable, with giant, marshmallow-soft pillows that allow for a sublime night's sleep.

In the morning, I sit at the same table by the French doors and listen to the birds in the luscious garden, while I sip coffee and daydream about a certain dip. *Doubles from £160. Small plates from £7. Farida Zeynalova*

THREE MORE

Cotswolds restaurants

THE DINING ROOM, MALMESBURY
The menu at this Michelin-starred restaurant, part of Whatley Manor hotel, changes seasonally, and has included dishes such as venison with caramelised quince. whatleymanor.com

THE BELL INN, LANGFORD
Peter Reed and Tom Noest, the duo behind this pub-restaurant, elevate simple pub food. Don't miss the garlic, parsley, shallots and bone-marrow flatbread. thebelllangford.com

ROYAL OAK, RAMSDEN
Expect high-quality seasonal pub grub at this 17th-century inn, from torched Cornish mackerel fillet to celeriac steak. royaloakramsden.com

IMAGES: THE DOUBLE RED DUKE

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IMAGE: GETTY

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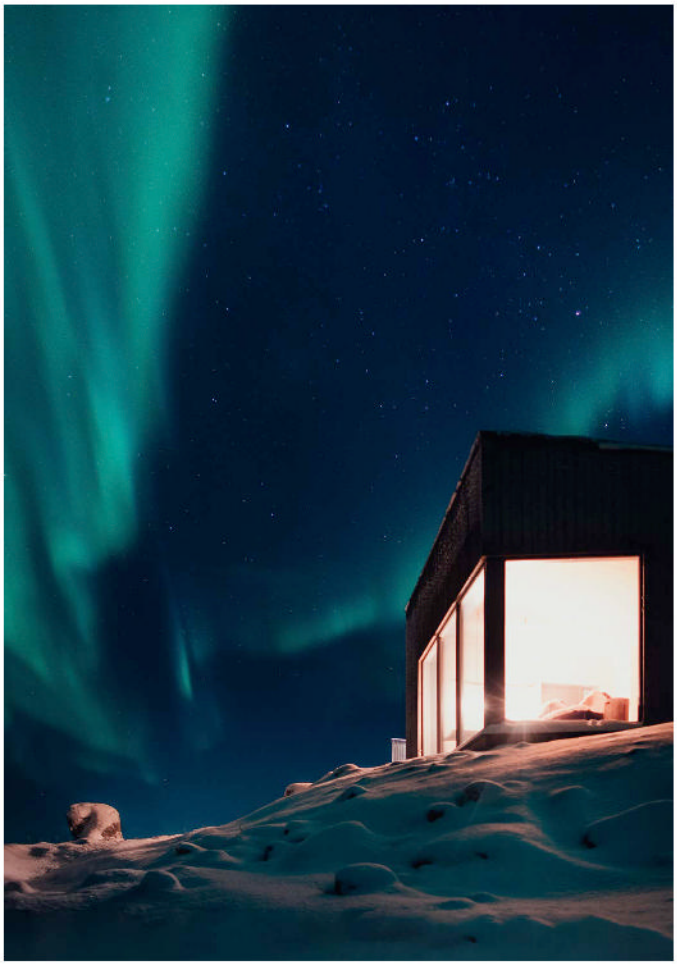

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WE'RE FOLLOWING ALICA RAMKIRPAL-SENHOUSE, A FLORIDA-BASED DIGITAL MARKETER AND FOOD BLOGGER CHAMPIONING HER GUYANESE HERITAGE

WHO ALICIA'S FOLLOWING

@chefdevan
I admire Chef Devan — he really draws you in with his big and bright personality. He recently did a great documentary in Guyana.

@thatnursecancook
Helena's energy is contagious, and you can really feel it. I can relate to her — she also grew up cooking as the child of an immigrant.

@foodienationtt
I love the all-encompassing presentation of Trinidadian cuisine on Foodie Nation. It's authentic and entertaining.

@thefamiliarkitchen
Ann's feed is a corner of comfort. She's dedicated to capturing the essence of her family's traditional Indian cooking.

What did you eat growing up?
West Indian/Caribbean food. I was surrounded by talented home cooks and learned about my culture through conversations and aromas in the kitchen — from brightly-spiced curries and soft rotis to simple but big flavoured ground provisions (fruits and vegetables) like cassava, eddoes and breadfruit — all sauteed up in fragrant onions and herbs. My mother's dhal puri and chicken curry is one of my favourite childhood dishes.

Why did you start your blog?
At the time, there weren't many websites dedicated to showcasing Guyanese cuisine. I saw an opportunity to nurture my food-writing hobby by sharing family recipes and cultural stories.

What's your favourite dish?
I love a hot fish curry made with gilbaka, a Guyanese catfish. Guyanese fish curries have a unique flavour because the gravy is simmered with unripened green mango or tamarind, giving it a nice tang and a balance of spicy, savoury, and sour. For dessert, local pastries, pine tarts and black-eye cakes are among my favourites to enjoy with a cold glass of mauby (a tree bark-based drink) or cream soda.

Where are your favourite places to eat in Georgetown, Guyana?
When we visit, all we really want is fresh, home-cooked food. However, some of my favourites are Hack's Halal and Maggie's Snackette for pastries and cakes, and New Thriving Restaurant for Guyanese-Chinese food.

What other cuisines do you love?
Vietnamese. Besides a good shrimp fried rice, one of my favourite dishes is cá kho, a caramelised and braised fish. I also love South Indian food — eating any regional Indian dishes gives me an insight into the history of Indo-Caribbean food.

ON THE TABLE

What we've been enjoying in the world of food and travel

I'VE BEEN EATING...

The seven-course lunch tasting menu at Akoko, in Fitzrovia, London. It's a spellbinding dining experience, with dishes showcasing a mix of fine seasonal British produce and West African culinary influences. The signature jollof rice is worth the visit alone, while the bespoke crockery, pottery and cutlery that come with each dish really elevate the experience. *Glen Mutel, editor*

What's your go-to Christmas leftover meal?

TURKEY SANDWICH
I slather the bread (whatever's in the house) with Dijon mustard before stuffing it with slices of leftover turkey and tons of Turkish pickles. *FZ*

MAC AND CHEESE
A concoction of cheese, stuffing, Marmite, brussels, red cabbage, turkey and crispy smashed potatoes. Not for the faint hearted. *Lauren Gamp, art editor*

CURRY
A curry with leftover ingredients — turkey, potatoes and veggies — served with fluffy rice and homemade rotis. *Flora Neighbour, branded content manager*

I'VE BEEN ENJOYING...

Mochi ice cream from Little Moons. It's gelatinous, addictive and comes in a variety of flavours, such as chocolate hazelnut, Himalayan salted caramel and Uji matcha green tea. Pick it up at most supermarkets. *Maria Pieri, editorial director*

little moons

I'VE BEEN TRYING...

Charcoal cheese. I had it for the first time at The Griffin Inn in Sussex. A real sensory befuddler, it's grey-black, like a black pudding, but has the texture of a firm nut butter on first bite. It then melts into a creamy black bomber-like cheddar. *Sarah Barrell, contributing editor*

STAMBECCO ITALY
TIRAMISU LIQUEUR

I'VE BEEN DRINKING...

Stambecco tiramisu liqueur. Bottled in Piemonte, Italy, it tastes just like my favourite dessert. I've been sipping it neat, but it's also great in hot chocolate as a magnificent night cap. *Farida Zeynalova, assistant editor*

THREE TO TRY

Food podcasts

1 Taste of Place
Dr Anna Sulan Masing zooms in on pepper with a beautiful journey into the flavour, neuroscience and memory associated with the spice.

2 Dish from Waitrose
Celebrities join host Nick Grimshaw and chef and restaurateur Angela Hartnett at the table for a meal and good conversation.

3 The Splendid Table
Hosted by food journalist Francis Lam, my favourite episode dives into all things pizza. *Josephine Price, digital editor*

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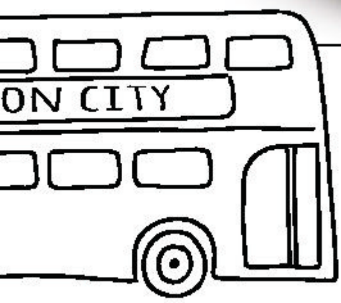

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